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Magazine
Issue #33

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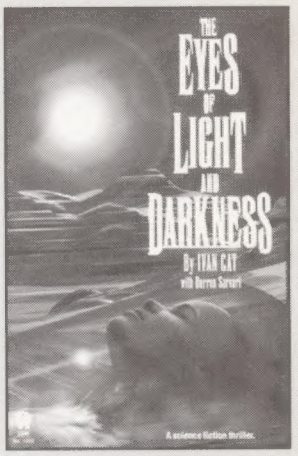

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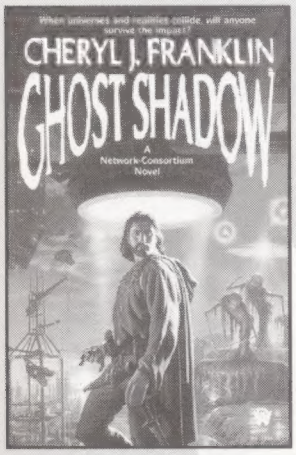
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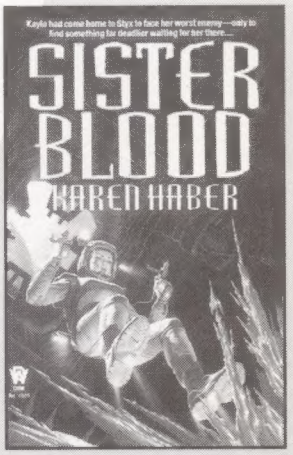
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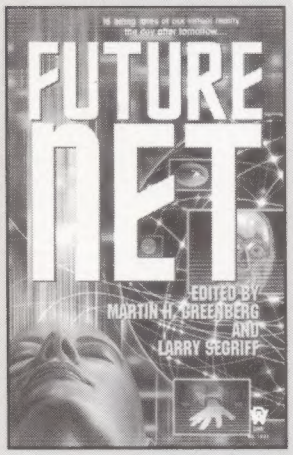

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MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY
Magazine

EDITORIAL

We're working hard to get this issue out in time for the Worldcon in Los Angeles. I always enjoy the opportunity to attend a Worldcon, although they have changed so very much since I began.

It was a long time ago — my first Worldcon. I think I paid two dollars for registration, and everyone was very cross, because a dollar — which it had always been before — seemed quite enough. I spent almost three days traveling on a train to get there: sitting up in coach and sleeping when I could nap a bit. One of my clearest memories is waking up in Madison, Wisconsin to bright sunrise. "Across the wide Missouri," as the song says.

There were actually two hundred people there — almost as many as lived in my small town in Texas. My then husband had just bid on a job in the little railroad town of Maryneal, population 35. Yes, that's just thirty five. I told him that if he wanted to go to Maryneal he could go alone; David and I would not go with him. This was the first time it had really occurred to me that I could get away from Texas. I had been guest of honor at a Westercon, in Dallas, and it had never occurred to me that he could or would want to go with me; but a few years later when we divorced, one of his more peevish complaints was that I'd never invited him to do so.

This was back in the early days when a fan could still find himself on one end of a sofa with Edmond Hamilton on the other, or go to a room party with Ted Sturgeon or Leigh Brackett. I remember going down in an elevator and hearing someone saying, "Here for instance is a little girl who has written some interesting books." I started to ask, "Who are you calling a little girl?" and I looked up and it was God — Robert A. Heinlein himself, with his wife.

Other notables I remember meeting there were Bjo Trimble, with whom I shared a room — at long distance because we were on very different schedules: me being usually early to bed and early to rise, and she a night person. Bjo Wells, as she was then, had waist-length red hair and was one of the most beautiful women I had ever seen. I also met Fritz Leiber, then young and very handsome. I had breakfast with him because we were about the only people awake at that hour.

I also remember meeting C. L. Moore (although this may have been at some later time) and being so bashful then that I could only stammer. She could not have been more gracious, which is why, when I meet a terrified teenager too shy to speak, I remember Ms. Moore, and deal out a hug and a few kind words. I later came to know her quite well. I remember once she was invited to speak to a woman's group where she began by looking out near-sightedly into the auditorium and saying bemusedly, "You're all so young; you could all be my daughters." And instantaneously every woman in the audience cried out, "We *are* your daughters, Catherine!"

I also met, briefly, Poul and Karen Anderson. I especially remember the all-night party: as the dawn broke over Lake Michigan from the 35th floor or something, Karen Anderson, then about twenty-something, with long black hair and absolutely gorgeous, started reciting, "There lies the golden road to Samarkand", and there wasn't a dry eye in the house. The Andersons were very nice to me when I moved out to the West coast a few years later. Karen has become a fine writer in her own right, as well as collaborating with Poul on the tetrology **THE LAND OF YS**. I'm delighted to have her work for the cover story in this issue.

Marion Zimmer Bradley

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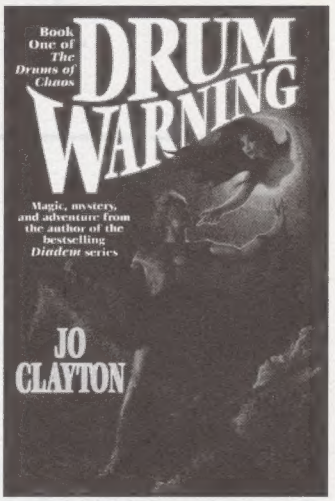
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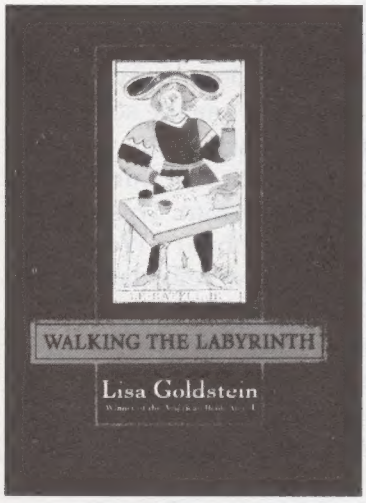

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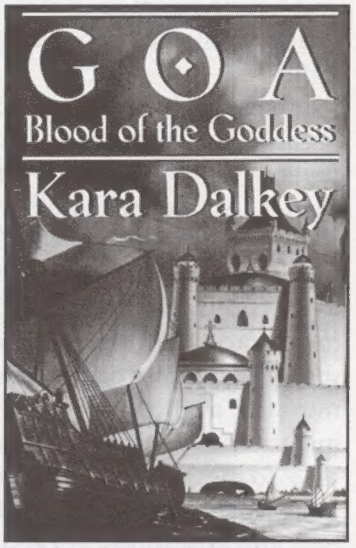

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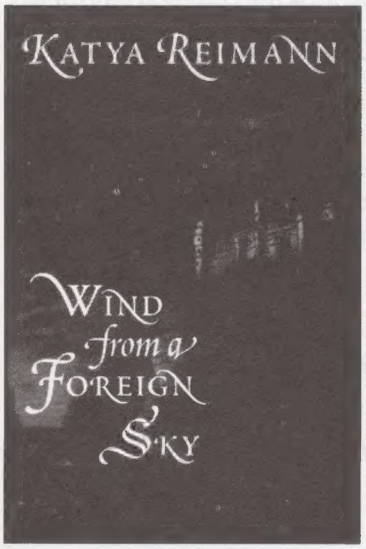

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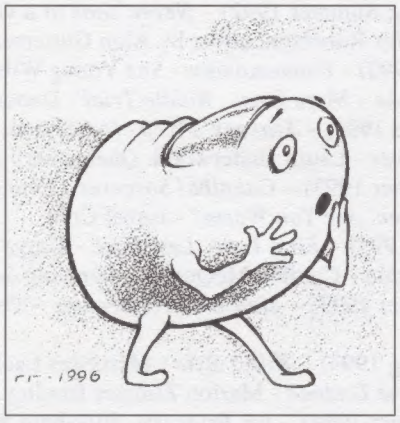

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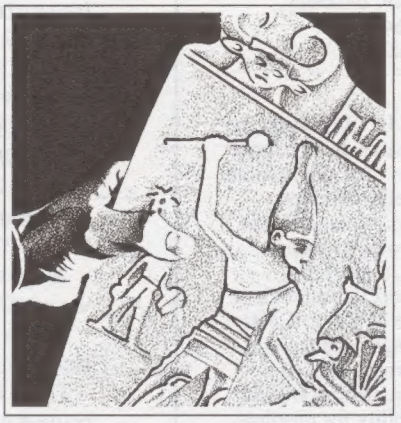

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A Sphinx in the Mind

by Karen Anderson

One day I found myself more sought-after than Jackie Onassis.

It happened like this.

About three years ago, when I reawakened the Theban Sphinx, she did a thorough job of fixing the fix I was in.

Have you ever noticed how a problem's solution becomes the next problem? Like replacing the horses that used to befoul city streets with their droppings, and getting air pollution from auto exhausts instead?

I had arrived in Greece a week before, for my grandmother's funeral. I had learned that my inheritance through my mother was nonexistent, because she was illegitimate instead of legally adopted. The lease had reverted and the house was going to be demolished for tourist development. But then a large stone had turned out to be the Sphinx, and I found her a Lewis Carroll riddle in place of the old one.

Spyros Nikolaides — whose family hadn't up to then acknowledged the kinship — agreed to arrange a retroactive birth certificate for my mother (by an imaginary brother-in-law of the Nikolaides who was Spyros's grandfather and mine) and dual Greek-American citizenship for me; deed me my grandmother's home for one drachma and other valuable considerations such as the Sphinx's allowing him to go on living; and set me up in an academic position with full tenure.

A new name for me was in order, too. Not that there was anything wrong with the one I had, considering that I was carrying on Great-grandfather Dickensheet's tradition of Greek scholarship. But Gran's name should now be recorded as that of the husband she hadn't had. Mother had kept her name when she married my father; sons would have had his name, I had hers. I needed to inherit a name along with Gran's house. I chose 'Andreas Pallax' for the recorded name of Gran's imaginary husband. It transliterates directly and won't tax a speaker of either language. (Which can't be said for Dickensheet.) As Lucy — well, Lysistrata — Pallax, I would own the house my great-grandfather had built on a hill near Thebes.

With home and job assured, I had only to go back to Oakland and wind up my affairs there.

Euphtianousa, "Good at Fixing", is one of my names for the Sphinx; or Chrysoleaina, "Golden Lioness"; or just Chrysops, "Golden". She decided to go to Oakland too. I showed her on the globe in Great-grandfather's library, where we had found her new riddle, and then described where I lived. She said it would not be difficult. I didn't like to ask her how fast she could travel. I just said *khaire* and headed for the airport, wondering how long it would be until I saw her again.

California is ten time-zones from Greece. I got home late at night and slept for twelve hours. When I woke, it was close to noon. Brightness splashed from the suncatcher in the window by my bed.

That window opens from a low sill onto a small lawn screened by hedges, private enough for sunbathing if I should want to. There lay Chrysoleaina, stretched out at ease with her cheek on her forepaw. How had she done it?

"*Khaire!*" I called. People who dislike "Have a nice day" must really get bent by the Greek hello/goodby, which means "Rejoice".

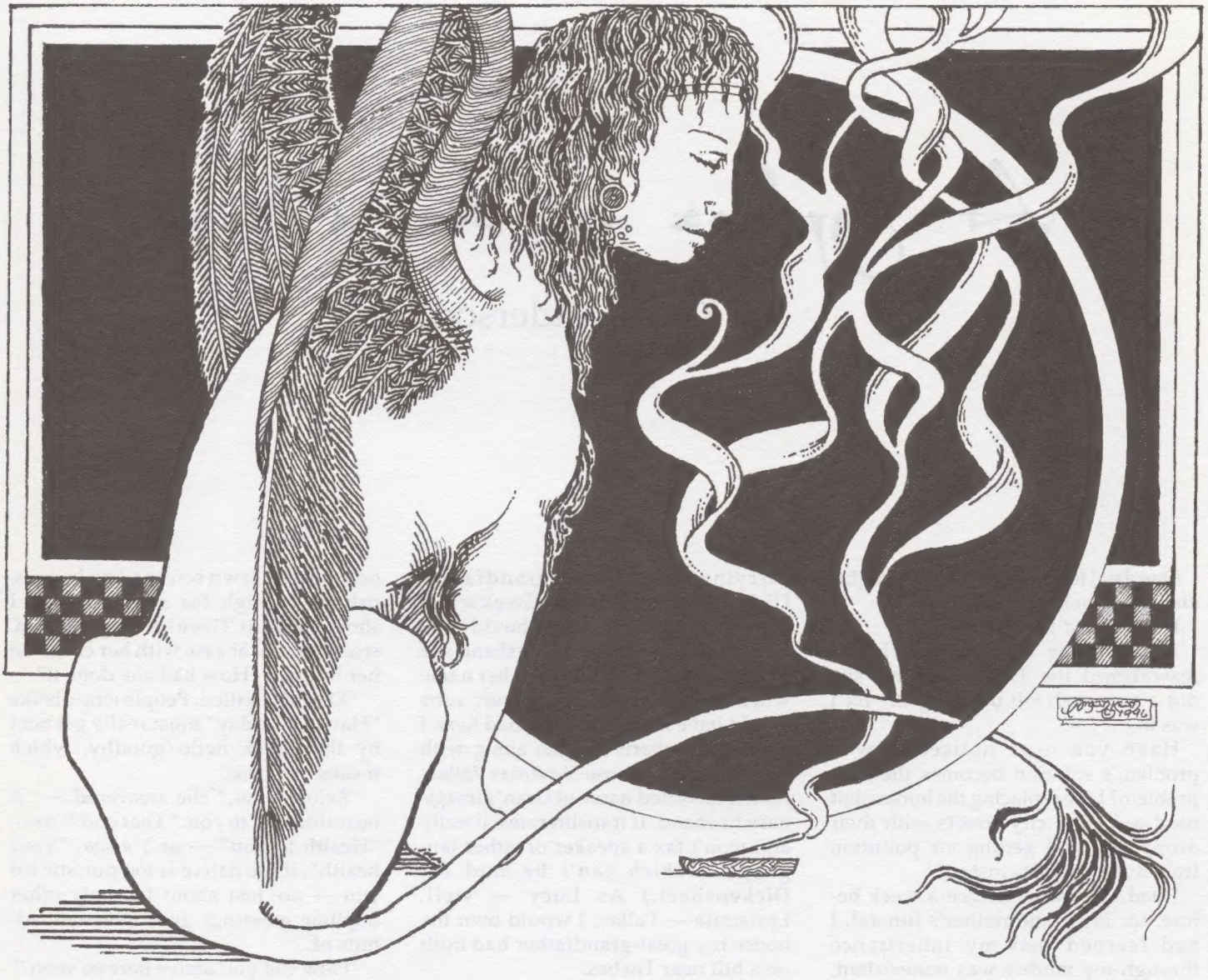
"*Kalimera sas*," she answered — "A beautiful day to you." That and *Y'a sas*, "Health to you" — or *Y'a sou*, "Your health", if the dative is too puristic for you — are just about the only other daytime greetings good manners admits of.

"How did you arrive here so soon?" I asked. "No bird can fly so swiftly."

"I do not fly as birds fly. Do you remember what Homer says of the ships of the Phaiekians?"

"In the *Odyssey*?" I thought for a moment. "That they have no need of a steering-oar, for they know the thoughts and minds of men — that's in Book VIII — yes, and Book VII says they can go to the furthest of lands without toil, and return home the very same day."

"Even so is it with me. My wings are as their oars, wherewith the Phaiekan youths tossed the brine; but each stroke counts for many furrowlengths. When you had gone from Thebes I waited until I could feel that you were at home. Then with swift wingbeats I took my way until I reached your dwelling. Now I see that the lands and seas truly form a globe! For the sun stood high in the sky over Hellas, but this land faced the



Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

starry dark. You have slept very late."

I did my best to explain jet-lag, the body's insistence on marching to the beat of a circadian drummer. To her, day was day, and she had been looking about since sunrise.

"I am much confused by what I see. This marvelous harbor holds a great many pleasure boats, but few merchantmen and war galleys. There are uncountable dwellings, but no drovers or farmers bringing food for the dwellers, and no marketplaces for the exchange of goods. Nor do I see the smoke of cookfires. I know that you, at least, cook sheep's flesh over the red-hot embers" — I'd been using Gran's outdoor grill when I inadvertently woke her from stony sleep — "but do these folk who set their houses in gardens live on the odor of flowers?"

"No, nor did my cousin Spyros arrive at my grandmother's house in a chariot drawn by griffins." That Mercedes-Benz was an example worth a day's lecture on the technological era. "We eat as mortals have always eaten; only the particulars change. Would you like to come in and see how I cook here?"

"Thank you, I will." She came in and looked around while I dressed.

The place is just one room with a half bath, converted from a single-car garage. It has a gas range and water heater for the kitchenette and shower; above those is a storage loft. Back-to-back bookshelves screen off the other end to make some privacy for sleeping. The furniture is Salvation Army.

Before I started the gas burner, I showed her the pilot light, telling her that we burn a fiery air collected from marshes. That's true as far as it goes. Why bring the Carboniferous into it? I started a pan of water heating and put together mug, filter cone, and filter. There wasn't much coffee left. I started a shopping list: coffee, fruit, bread — "Is there anything I can get you?" I asked Chrysops. "You like cooking smells, I know; what about incense? Sandalwood? Cedar?"

"Any fragrant wood — but your cook-fire is not wood. And I see in your thought that 'incense' is not firewood but the thinnest possible splinter."

While the coffee dripped I found part of a broken stick and set it going. She half-closed her eyes, like a cat at a fireplace. "Very pleasing," she said.

I added that to the list. Cardboard boxes, of course; I'd want to keep a few

books and give the rest away. I emptied a small can of corned beef hash into a frying pan. I'll never get used to the Greek notion that you break your fast with a cup of coffee, and midmorning is soon enough for the first bite of bread.

Grocery bags would do for discarded clothes. Most of my wardrobe was too scruffy for street wear anyplace but Berkeley, where the sixties are still going on. San Francisco has its phoenix, and Oakland its oak tree; but if Berkeley had a flag it would be a tie-dyed peace symbol.

When I'd eaten, I phoned my aunt in San Francisco to let her know I was home. Her machine answered, and I left the message. Then I headed for the grocery.

Once I was in the store, I found a clerk who told me where to find boxes that were waiting to be flattened, and I nested several together. I kept pretty well to my shopping list, trying to buy only a few days' worth of provisions.

But there was, as I said, a problem. Here was where I got my first hint of it.

At the checkout the usual tabloids were blatting their usual — LIZ FIGHTS FOR LIFE, DI'S SECRET REFUGE, NASA MOON COVERUP — but a small subhead on one caught my eye. *Legendary Sphinx Returns, Has New Riddle*, it said. I looked. The story was a brief one, on a page far inside; it was datelined Thebes. I added the paper to my groceries, paid and went home.

I took the food to the kitchenette to put away. The message light was flashing on the telephone. It could wait; probably it was a message from my aunt.

"You're in the news," I told Chrysops, opening the paper on the table. "This is supposed to be you, killing someone who couldn't answer your riddle." The drawing gave her a Tutankhamen headdress and fangs out of a monster movie. "It says you've come back with a new one, and — oh dear! It says that authorities in Thebes deny that anyone has been attacked."

"Does that distress you? Surely any who might be frightened should be reassured."

"On the contrary. There have been many cases of governments concealing information and newspapers publishing their secrets. Now people believe that if the authorities deny something, it must be true."

"I do not mind frightening people. I was created to do so. But I hope you will not suffer by associating with me, for I enjoy your friendship."

"Nothing is said about me. There will be no problem," I assured her.

Little did I know.

It wasn't to be hoped that a full-sized Greek Sphinx, a winged lioness with a woman's head and bust, could be seen by two workmen and not attract the attention of the entire western world.

Spyros, of course, would rather forget the embarassing details of what had happened. I was willing to say nothing. If I put him to shame, I'd have a lifelong enemy. But there were Theo and Yanni, his employees; and Yanni tends not to respect anything that doesn't have an engine or explode.

I don't know how many people Yanni and Theo told the story to, or how far it ran by word of mouth. I do know that it got on the Net; later, I was able to find a few pieces of the story. But I had no idea anyone would come looking for me at home, just because I'd met a mythical being on the other side of the world.

I finished putting away my groceries and played the phone messages. The first was CNN; they asked me to call a number about an interview. The next was a local KPIX, then CBS, then KQED —

If I answered one, I'd have to answer them all. Unless I wanted to negotiate for an exclusive story, which I didn't.

If they could get my phone number, they could find my address.

I locked my door, let down the matchstick blind over the kitchen window, and looked up the driveway. As I stood there, I saw a van with the KTVU logo pass my old Toyota and nose down the drive. I moved softly back past the bookcases. They'd have to go through a stout hedge to look in the window by the bed. Chrysops followed me, and we sat in silence. There was a brisk knock at the door. It was repeated, growing louder each time.

Talk about being in a fix. I stared at the suncatcher, an oval of glass with a golden-yellow California poppy. It had been a comfort of sorts on gray winter mornings, but it only mocked me on this bright afternoon.

Finally the knocking stopped and we heard the van drive away.

"What was that woman's purpose toward you?" asked the Golden Lioness.

"Was it a woman? I didn't see. To ask me questions, and show the world an image of me as I answered."

"I saw her mind. It was not friendly of her."

No, it wasn't, and there were going to be more.

I went up to the Toy, backed it carefully down the drive, and closed the chin-high gate. I wished I had a lock for it.

I fetched my grocery boxes to the bookshelves and began sorting.

The next morning, Monday, there had not yet been any follow-up from the news media. I went to my bank, closed my account, and took the money partly in cash and partly as a cashier's check.

Not long after I got home there was a knock. I left my coffee cup by the shelf where I was working, glanced through the matchstick blind, and saw a gray sedan parked in the upper part of the driveway. I couldn't see any logo. Through the pane in the door I saw there was only one of him, wearing a suit. No camera. I unlocked and opened the door.

He showed me a little leather wallet containing a hologrammed plastic card with his photograph and the name Herman Balestier. It specified a government agency. Do you need to know which? No? Then I don't need to tell you, do I? Besides, officially our government has no such agency.

"Good morning, Ms. Dickensheet. May I come in?" he asked. Like the Undead, his kind can't cross your threshold uninvited. I wish they had some other traditional characteristics, like being under a moral obligation if they eat your bread and salt. Or drink your coffee. So I didn't offer him any.

"Well, I'm busy, but I can take a short break."

He came in and we sat down.

"No Such Agency has had a report from Thebes about the Sphinx, and I've come here to get the details," he said.

"Why on earth is the government interested?" I asked, puzzled. "She isn't a citizen, doesn't have an income to tax, and won't ever need Social Security."

"We need to know whether she is a potential threat — or asset — to the nation's security."

The back of my neck prickled, as though trying to raise the hackles I don't have. "A threat? An asset? How could she be? She's not some kind of spook, she's a myth!"

"Myth or not, we need to know her

capabilities. How far can she fly? How high? Can she recognize a hardened site?"

I couldn't believe this. "Whether she can or not, why would she want to?"

"We want her to," he said, as if that were reason enough.

She strolled from behind the bookshelves and asked *"Tí hode aner estí?"*

I had to laugh at her word choice. Not "who" but "what is this man." What he was just then was pretty thoroughly croggled.

"This is Herman Balestier. *Oiketes arkhonton hemeteron estí,"* I said. "Do you mind if we speak English?"

"No, so long as I may ask the meaning of what I do not understand. Why do your archons' servants not speak Greek, like reasonable people?"

I answered, "They meet so few."

Balestir had paled briefly, but got over his astonishment. If he had been frightened, now he was angry and beginning to turn red.

"May I ask you a few questions, Ms. Sphinx?" he demanded.

"Why? I know nothing of armies or missiles-throwing," she said. "What do you want of this lady, who is a Greek scholar, if you have no Greek speech?"

"I'm not here to talk about Greek! And if you don't know anything about ballistic missiles, why did you think I'm here to ask about them?" he shouted, his color becoming purplish.

"She mistook your name for a job description — *Herman*, army man; *Balestier*, arbalest shooter," I explained to him, and then to Chrysops, "His work is in security, *asphaleia*."

"Pledge? Bond?" she asked.

"He may think he's some kind of Bond, but he isn't. No, it means the safety of the country — like securing a door. He'd lock the Golden Gate if he knew how."

Balestier began to sputter about my duty as a citizen, but just then his cellphone chirped and he calmed down to answer it. After a brief interchange, he said, "There's a CNN crew on the way. We'd rather you didn't make any public statement just now."

"That suits me," I said. "I haven't time for that kind of thing."

"There'll be no stopping the media if anyone sees the Sphinx." He went to the window over the sink, looked up toward the street. "We can post someone at the driveway gate —"

"Not on your life. They'd know I'm here, and set up camp."

The phone rang, and we waited while it recorded the message. It was KQED, asking me to make an appointment for an interview with a mythologist.

He came back from the window and loomed at me. "The best thing," he said in a brook-no-nonsense tone, "would be to move you out right now to a safe house."

I jumped up. "That's ridiculous. I'm not doing anything on your say-so."

"It's for your own safety. Get what you'll need for overnight, and we'll go."

"Have you a warrant for my arrest?"

"We're just concerned for your safety-"

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"I'll get a padlock for the gate, borrow a German shepherd I know, and put up a Beware sign."

"A guard dog? How dangerous is he? I'll need to come here again —"

"This dog could kiss you to death. All he has going for him is his bark. I'll only need a few days to pack up, anyway."

"Where are you going?"

Damn! I shouldn't have said that. I thought fast. "To my aunt's."

"The one you phoned yesterday afternoon?"

I nodded. The prickle at the back of my neck turned chill and crawled downward.

He went back to the telephone and ordered an unlisted number for me, writing it first in a notebook and then on a card.

"Here," Balestier said, offering me the card; when I stepped back he put it on the table. "Let me know before you go. And I'll be back to see you tomorrow, after I've conferred with my superior." He left.

Chrysops turned to me and said, "I think he sees advantage for himself in you, on account of me."

"You're beginning to see human motives pretty well."

"This is a grief to me."

"You need only go elsewhere, let no one see you. They'll eventually give up and decide it was a mistake of some kind. It's you they're interested in, not me."

"So much is clear. Yet I find myself unwilling to part from you."

"Not permanently. Only until the world's attention is taken by something else... Do you like mountains?"

"I am bred of them," she said, with the beginning of a smile.

"How would you like to see mountains too sheer for ice to cling to them, where no foot has trodden in a million years?" I found an old *Geographic* in a discard box and showed her Antarctica. "At this season, the globe's north is tipped toward the sun; darkness and storm hold the south. Few humans work there outside the daylight season."

"It arouses interest in me. I will go there."

She went out the window by the bed. I closed it after her and watched her take off. Would I have this kind of trouble if I were in Greece? I wondered. Athens is as much a city of the world as New York, but Thebes is smaller than Bozeman, Montana. A quarter of the population cultivate a quarter of the land; the other three quarters is only fit for sheep and goats and mountain climbers.

Meanwhile, I needed to lock the gate. I went up to the back of the house that mine had been the garage of, and knocked on the kitchen door. The man I rent from (he rejects the term 'landlord') waved me in.

"Need help packing?" he asked.

"It's mostly done. Boxes for the Salvation Army, sacks of trash. I don't have much that's worth shipping to Greece."

"You can just leave those. I'll take care of it."

"Thanks. You might like some of the books."

"What did Channel 2 want?"

"Make news out of me. Which I don't want. You care why?" I knew it was an article of faith with him that you had a right to do your own thing and no one should hassle you for it.

"There was a suit too. Looked Fed. You need help? If there's a bust coming down, I seriously don't want to know about it."

"The worst they can have on me is not wanting to play with their marbles. Could that gate be locked on the inside? For all you know, I might be somewhere else."

"Cool." He rummaged around and found a combination padlock. "Combination's twelve-one-five."

"1215? Runnymede?"

"You got it," he grinned.

"Cool," I said.

Nothing new happened the rest of Monday. I did more sorting while daylight lasted, had a sandwich, and took a beer to drink while I sat in the back windowsill and looked across the Bay. The little house seemed very empty.

Tuesday I finished my sorting, interrupted by another visit from Balestier. He assumed the Sphinx was merely sulking, and told me to get her back. I told him to get her himself.

Wednesday he was there again, warning me not to go anywhere without notifying him. I wanted to say a few farewells, but not while he had a tap on my phone.

That afternoon I was sitting in the window again when I felt a stirring of air behind me. I turned and saw the Sphinx on the bed.

"The mountains were beautiful, but I became lonely," she said.

"I didn't realize you could be lonely!"

"Nor I, for I was created for vengeance, not friendship. The one was bitter, the other is sweet."

My throat clogged up then; I sat down by her and hugged her.

"I'm glad you're back," I said after a while. "How did you get in, though? Everything is shut tight but that window. "

"Material barriers do not hinder me. I was there, I am here."

"You feel as material as anything else! You're warm, and furry, and — " Then something struck me. "But your hair never needs combing."

"You knew already that I do not eat. Like the Olympians, I am nourished not by what is offered, but by the will to offer."

I hugged her again. "Whatever I have to offer is yours."

"You are not happy here," she said. "Will you return to Thebes?"

"Yes," I said. "I've had enough of this. I'll call now to make a reservation."

I didn't think I was saying it to any ears but hers and my own, but the phone gave one ring and the speaker said, "Don't do it, Ms. Dickensheet."

I snatched up the handset. "Balestier!" I snarled.

"We'd really rather you didn't leave the country just now," he said. "Tomorrow we'll move you to a safe house."

I called him a scaldit skaitbird and common scamelar, hung up, and went out the back window where I flopped on the grass.

I'd have to get out of the country without his agency's knowing it.

Chrysoleaina, the Golden Lioness, lay down beside me.

"How much can you carry when you fly?" I asked her. "Could you carry my weight?"

"I would it were possible," she said. "It is not."

A car horn tooted. I didn't feel like going to look, but the Sphinx said, "That is someone whose duty is to give you a package, mark a tally, and go away. Otherwise he must leave you a notice and come again."

I looked. I couldn't imagine what FedEx might have for me, but I opened the door and waved. The driver got out and handed me a cardboard envelope and his clipboard to sign.

It was from a Greek government of-

fice, though I wasn't sure what its name signified. I opened it to find a complete set of Greek papers: passport, property registration, the works. If No Such Agency wanted control of Sphinx, maybe someone was afraid they'd get it. My documentation must have gone through the relevant bureaus like a gang of ninjas. Did Balestier know? I devoutly hoped not.

The phone rang as I was thinking this. Balestier wanted to know what had been delivered. How was the yadswiver watching, and how much detail could he see?

"A tax bill from Greece," I said furiously. "For property I want to live on and enjoy. If you don't stop hassling me I'll get an injunction against you."

"I'm not going to put up with much more of your stubbornness," he said. "Prepare to move to a safe house. If you aren't ready to go tomorrow morning promptly at nine, I'll obtain a warrant for your arrest."

"I'll have my lawyer here at nine A. M.," I told him firmly.

I sat down. *Polymetis*, of many counsels, was one of Homer's names for Odysseus. What would he have done next? He'd had help from Athene in returning to Greece. I had the Sphinx; but how could I discuss plans with her under Balestier's nosy bugs?

"Chrysops," I said, "you know the works of Homer quite well, don't you?"

"Yes, but not always the exact phrasing."

I took my *Odyssey* off the shelf by the bedside lamp, found a passage in the first book, and pointed to the phrase 'If they saw him returned to Ithaka'. "I think it would be a good idea for you to spend some time tomorrow reading this. With the gate locked, we can leave the curtains open to let in daylight."

She smiled. "How well Homer puts things." She understood what I had in mind, and showed me she did. The pages riffled of themselves, lay flat; she extended a claw to touch a passage: 'Had I learned he was planning this journey, he would certainly have stayed here, however eager he was to be gone.'

"Indeed," I said. I turned pages: ...'Keep knowledge of this to yourself' ...'until she misses me and hears I am gone.'

"Reading this will surely be profitable." I stood up; she lay on the bed and began intoning: *Andra moi ennepe, mousa, polutropon...*

While her musical voice continued, I put an open suitcase on the table in the living area, and started laying things out. "The man of many turns." I would seem to head one way, turn and go another. Underwear. Comb, brush, and such grouped in the lid. A few blouses. I draped my good wool suit across a chair, and a couple of scarves including a real Hermès silk print across another. The Nearly-New shop is wonderful. Purse beside the suitcase. What else? Ah, yes. A prescription bottle. I filled an old one with aspirin and set it by the purse. Then I turned out all but the reading light and raised the matchstick blind. The back of the bookcase cast a solid shadow over the living area. Come daylight, anyone who got a look over the top of the gate could see the unfinished packing.

I put the absolute essentials of money, credit cards, passport, and personal treasures in a plastic shopping bag. Toothbrushes are easy to replace. I added the poppy suncatcher and hugged Chrysoleaina silently in farewell. Then I went out the back window and slid it shut behind me.

I skidded down the steep bank to the neighbor's driveway and on out of there. A superdrug provided a carryon and a few other things for cash. I phoned a friend I hadn't seen for so long

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Balestier could never have heard of her. Finally, I got a taxi to a motel with shuttle service to SF International, checked in, and asked to be called at four-thirty, taken to the airport at five. Cash again.

I hoped my beloved Fixer kept convincing Balestier's bugs that I was at home.

The wake-up call came. Once at the airport, I paid cash for a ticket to Toronto. I showed my old US passport and spun a tale of a vindictive husband that got my name on the ticket as Mary Brown. The flight was theoretically full, but the sympathetic clerk assured me there would be cancellations, and jumped me to the head of the standby list.

Meanwhile, Beth was using my credit card number to buy a ticket on the first flight to San Diego and reserve a rental car with the insurance needed for Mexico. I knew it would be reported to Balestier, but was sure he wouldn't see it before nine. When nine o'clock came, I was well on my way to Toronto. I hoped the Hertz reservation in my own name with the request for Mexican insurance was so very obvious that Balestier would think it a double feint, and waste several hours believing I was in the neighborhood of my medicine bottle and good clothes, before trying to find where I'd really gone.

In Toronto I scanned the departure listings for the next to cross the Atlantic. Lufthansa, it turned out, could take me to Frankfurt, with an easy connection to Athens.

I used my new Greek name and passport. Once over the ocean I finally believed I'd make it.

On the ground at Frankfurt, it was well into morning, though it was still evening in California. I'd reach Athens about midday, making it no more than bar-closing time in Oakland. But I'd better get some sleep before dealing with the rest of today. The duty-free area at Frankfurt is huge, an all-luxury shopping mall. I found what looked like the answer to sleeping in flight: a C-shaped inflatable pillow that fits around the neck.

After the stewardess cleared away breakfast, I settled myself with my new pillow and let go of awareness. I woke to the stewardess requesting that I bring my seat back upright. When we were on the ground, I pulled my carryon to my lap. Customs first. Then — should I go direct to Thebes? Spend a night in Athens? Gran used to talk about that nice little place over the restaurant on Odos Korai —

I came into the arrival area. That was when I felt like Jackie O.

My Greek name was no disguise, and my arrival had not been any kind of secret, not to the paparazzi, not to anybody at all — unless maybe to No Such Agency and its likes. If they'd had a clue, I would have been stopped at passport control.

This almost looked worse. How was I going to get through them? I wished the Golden Lioness were there, and then she came around the corner behind me. The front ranks pulled back, but others took their places; with all the cellphones in sight, more would soon be on the way.

An airport employee was suddenly at my elbow to lead me through an Authorized Only door. "Kyria Pallax," he said, "I regret we haven't the facilities here to accommodate this crowd."

"I don't care to accommodate them, in any case," I said, "but I doubt there's any way to escape. I'd appreciate your advice. Suppose I call a press conference, later today, in Athens?"

"The lion-eagle-lady — is she truly the Sphinx from the myths? Is she very dangerous? She is a very great sensation!"

"We had to leave California on account of the sensation," I said. "She is really the Sphinx who asked the riddle, but she is my friend now, and won't hurt anyone well-disposed to me."

"An announcement of a press conference should get the crowd to leave the airport. Where shall I say it is to be?"

"I don't know anything about having one. Where do people hold them?"

"Often, at a hotel. The Athenæum Inter-Continental and Athens Hilton have meeting rooms, some very large."

"Large prices, too, I fear. But I can hardly stand on a table in Omonia Square. I'll need a room for at least one night myself. I suppose their staff are used to protecting guests from undesired visitors."

"Will the Sphinx occupy the room with you?"

Chrysops was there with us, though I hadn't seen her come through the door. "Do not concern yourself with provision for me," she said. "I am present or absent as I will, and no doorkeeper or servingmaid need know."

"Then — if I may speak freely?" he asked with a bit of embarassment.

"Go ahead. I know I need whatever advice I can get here."

"Their staff can keep away callers," said the employee, "but this is so great a sensation, they will expect truly generous tips. Otherwise they would be inclined to accept offers from reporters."

And I'd have to start handing out such tips from the start. "Do you have a better suggestion?"

"You could go to a small, quiet hotel very close by the Hilton. For not too much, you could hire a personal guard, a woman who will be able to guide you from one to the other by way of the service entrances, and who is acquainted with the security personnel."

"That sounds like a very good idea. I wonder, if it wouldn't be too much trouble —" I took out my wallet — "can you arrange all this for me? Starting with transport to the hotel?"

"It is my pleasure!" He waved away the very idea of money. "This is no more than my duty to a *xéne*. They are mercenary at the big hotels, not really Hellene, you understand; they don't have real hospitality there." The Greek word for it is *philoxenia*, love of strangers. The language makes no distinction between 'stranger' and 'guest'. He spoke into a phone. "There will be a taxi here in a moment. The driver is my cousin. He'll take you to the Ilissia, where your personal guard will meet you. She is a cousin of mine, very good, very experienced. While you rest she will arrange with the Hilton for the press conference."

We exchanged courtesies as the taxi drew up. Since it would have been bad manners to press money on him, I gave him the poppy suncatcher.

The hotel was just what I wanted, small, quiet, and air-conditioned. My guard was waiting and introduced herself. She wore a business-like suit with a security company's shoulder patch, but we were quickly on first-name terms. Kleo explained we would share a double room — "You might regret it, if I were further away."

We went in. Kleo stopped. Chrysops was sitting upright on a chair.

"*Y'a sou, Kleo,*" she said in a friendly tone. In demotic, too — I noticed the *sou* where the "pure" style calls for the dative *sas*; she must want to put her at her ease.

"*Y'a sou, kyria,*" Kleo answered, a little tentatively. She looked at me.

"Will this do? I ordered some lunch, in case you'd like to eat before resting."

I glanced around. Twin beds, table, refrigerator; through a door, a bath tub. "Thank you," I said. "This will do very well."

We had bread, a salad with plenty of cheese and olives, retsina. "May you share our pleasure," I toasted the Lioness.

As we ate, Kleo told me about the tentative arrangements she had made. There would be a platform with chairs for me, herself, and at least one of the hotel's security people. Would Euptianousa be present? What accomodation would she like? There would be a table with water-pitcher and glasses on the platform, and another near the entrance for press and others. Did I want to offer anything else? I suggested coffee — we didn't want the press peeved at us; but we didn't need to feed them. Kleo called the Hilton and went over it all.

When we'd rested they called back. The story had kept spreading, and they'd revised estimates upward more than once; we would be in the grand ballroom, with several cameras for live feed. The security manager would met us at the delivery entrance.

It was time to go. Chrysoleaina gave me her lion's hug. "All will be well," she said.

Kleo led the way; we slipped unseen by the same routes that remove the garbage and bring in the supplies. In the Hilton, we were conducted through a service door into an area behind a curtain. It made a wing to stage right of a two-steps-up platform; it had a stage-left mate.

They had drawn a line on the carpet in duct tape that made a six-foot moat around the platform. Inside the front corners were stocky men in loosely cut suits who stood with the deceptive stillness of alligators. There were chairs on the platform for Kleo and me, and a large hassock for the Lioness.

A babble of tongues broke out at the sight of us. The front rows were full of the carnivores of the press; they ran the gamut from ultra-conservative papers like the London *Times* to infra-any-dignitatem tabloids. At center were the videocameras and their floodlights. Flashguns went off like the middle of a Fourth of July finale. Back behind all the glare I could make out some hastily made placards and banners. One of the photographers, *L'Inquisitore Romano* I think it was, tried a lunge across with his strobe blazing in my face. Kleo had him on the floor and the film out of the

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camera before you could say Hubris. He was hauled away.

Since well before Pericles, the Greeks have had a word for people who mind their own business instead of engaging in the life of the city. The word is *idiot*. When St. Paul went to the Areopagus he found that "all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear of some new thing" — Acts 17.

Paul and Pericles both would have recognized that crowd. Every one of them demanded that I say a word, just one little word, to their segment of the public, with its overwhelming need of my attention.

Things got more or less sorted out.

Euptianousa refused to be flustered. "*Khairete*, O Hellenes," she said. "I do not choose to answer questions. Be courteous to my mortal friend." She twitched the endmost tip of her tail and was still.

The questions came. What got me was that they were so *silly*. I think the askers were just trying to assure their audience, or themselves, that they were participants in the return of the Sphinx and not mere onlookers. I answered:

I was going to live in the house at Thebes, liked bouzouki music, planned to start translating *Œdipus the King* at once, didn't play the bouzouki, had no boyfriend or girlfriend and no plans to acquire any, didn't plan to take bouzouki lessons, had no preference for any political party (using the dative, and leaving them to interpret the katharevousa as they liked). And preferred the Greek words of the Melina Mercouri song over the English ones, but refused to sing it for them in any language.

Most of the press piranhas moved away with what soundbites they could snatch. But although the mob at the Arrival area had had more lenses than Argus had eyes, it seemed no one had gotten a picture of any kind. The news photographers had been sent back, and this time there were to be photos, not excuses. One of them had brought a Polaroid.

He shot a whole pack of film from various angles, Chrysops alone on the hassock, Kleo and me behind her. He laid them, one after the other, in a row. As they developed it became clear that she didn't register in any of them. Hassock, Kleo, me —just no Sphinx. After that the photo session was pretty well over.

A courtroom sketch-artist present was doing just fine.

Another group of people began to move up. Their clothes had the kind of scruffy semiformality I've noticed goes with the physical sciences.

One with wire-rimmed glasses asked if he might weigh and measure the Sphinx. He had a tape-measure with him, and a colleague had a large scale on a dolly outside.

"You may try," she said, "but you will not be able to. I am not material."

And he couldn't; he kept wiping his glasses and blinking, as though he couldn't quite focus on the tape and Chrysops at one time. They brought in the weighing scale. She left the platform and stepped onto it, but her weight just wouldn't register. Meanwhile he discovered that he could see her quite clearly without his glasses, against a fuzzy world.

They all had to try it. The ones with good sight borrowed glasses to throw their vision off; she was always clear to the smallest detail.

The scientists buzzed and circled like bees swarming. All bets were off; now they had a whole set of new questions. How did the mind perceive something that didn't act on the senses?

Several of the scientists had laptops and modems along, connected to their offices; information was out on the net in no time, and a multiple conference began proliferating. Questions were routed in and answers — if there were any — went back out.

Psychic researchers, skeptics, religious leaders — everyone had questions and speculations. Did the nonphysical Sphinx validate nonphysical angels, pagan gods, appearances of the Virgin? Was she the Devil's work? A sign of the Second Coming? The beginning of the Age of Aquarius?

And of course there were accusations of hoaxing. Maskelyne's wartime illusions were cited. There were several versions of how an audience of magicians including Houdini had or had not been taken in by Conan Doyle's moving pictures of dinosaurs. (That had been Willis O'Brien's experimental stop-motion footage for *The Lost World*.) Was this a new kind of hologram? If it was an illusion, how was it being done? The hoax theory is still running neck-and-neck with the theory that she was off a flying saucer.

That part got to be fun. I wish it could have gone on for a while; some really interesting philosophical questions were being raised, concerning the validity of nonphysical experience and the nature of the mind.

But then a knot of people came in with Herman Balestier at their head. Some of them were his colleagues, and others were from the Greek equivalent of No Such Agency.

The fun was over.

What it boiled down to was that each side insisted that my duty (as an American citizen) (as a Greek citizen) (choose one) called for putting the Fix to work.

"I wish none of you had ever seen her," I said. "You only think you need her because she's there."

She looked at me with a surprised and speculative expression. And then she faded out of sight.

"Where did she go?" asked one of the Greeks.

"Bring her back," demanded Balestier.

I heard her voice quite clearly as she said, "If they cannot see me, they cannot prove I am here."

"Bring who back?" I asked, mock-innocently.

"The Sphinx!"

I shook my head. "The Sphinx is a mythical being."

That was my story, and I stuck to it. The Sphinx did not exist.

If they thought such a creature had been around, it was their problem. Let them prove it. It must have been a hoax or a mass hallucination.

There was no evidence of her existence, was there? It was all in their minds.

That's not to say no one ever saw her again. I see her whenever I like. She shows herself to people who wish me well; but the likes of Balestier can take a running jump at themselves.

A sphinx in the mind is worth two in the spook shop, any day of the week.

And always on Sunday.

❄

NOTES by the author, for the reader's interest

"Scaldit skaitbird and common scamelar" — Scots, obsolete: *scaldit*, "having a scalp disease, scabby"; *skaitbird*, uncertain (possibly a skua or a scaldcrow); *scamelar*, variant of *scambler*, "parasite or sponger". The OED cites this single line from the *Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy* for all three words; the spelling is corrected to the OED's.

Andra moi ennepe, Mousa, polutropon — Homeric. "Tell me, Muse, of the man of many turns..." The first line of the *Odyssey*

Archons — Rulers, especially elected rulers

Areopagos — Classical. Mars Field; translated "Mars Hill" in *Acts*.

Athens Hilton - Second only to the Athenæum.

Athenæum Inter-Continental — The biggest hotel in Athens

bouzouki — a stringed instrument something like a lute, or the music played on it

Chrysoleaina — From Classisal *chrysos*, gold, and *leaina*, lioness: Golden Lioness, name for the Sphinx

Chrysops — Classical. "Gold-seeming", "gold-colored", name for the Sphinx

Demotic — The slangy or "informal" dialect; employs the genitive case but not dative; associated with liberal politics

Dickensheet — Family name. In honor of Dean Dickensheet, who gave me the idea that became "The Theban Fix".

Euphtianousa — Modern. "She who arranges things well" — In "The Theban Fix" I spelled it wrong, with a p instead of ph. It's clumsy, doesn't abbreviate well, and not of classical origin. The Sphinx has no personal name, only nicknames; 'sphinx' means choker or strangler. I am using Chrysops (Gold-colored), Leaina (Lioness), and Chrysoleaina (Gold-lioness) with the idea that they are more meaningful to the reader and easier to say.

Hellas — Classical and Modern. The Greek name for Greece

Hellene — Greek

Herman Balestier — agent of No Such Agency

Hubris — Classical and Modern. Insolence, outrage, abuse. Repaid by *Nemesis*, retribution.

Ilissia — A small hotel (a Best Western, in fact) near the Athens Hilton

Infra-any-dignitatem — From *infra dignitatem*, Latin, "beneath one's dignity"

Ithaka — Home of Odysseus

Kalimera sas — Modern. A beautiful day to you. (Katharevousa.)

Katharevousa — Modern. The formal or "puristic" dialect of modern Greek; it employs the dative case and is associated with conservative politics.

Khaire, pl. *khairete* — Classical and Modern. "Rejoice." Hello, goodbye.

Kleo — Woman's name

Kyria — Ms., ma'am, lady

L'Inquisitore Romano — Italian. Made-up newspaper name, after *L'Osservatore Romano*; *Inquisitore* means either "inquirer" or "inquisitor".

Leaina — Classical. "Lioness", name for the Sphinx

Lysistrata — Woman's name; name of a play

Melina Mercouri — star of *NEVER ON SUNDAY*

No Such Agency — The United States Government has no such agency.

Odos Korai — A street in Athens

Oiketes arkhonton hemetron esti. — Classical. "He is a servant of our archons."

Omonia Square — A large, very busy square in central Athens

Œdipus the King — play by Sophocles

Pallax — A Classical word meaning a young man or woman, or a concubine. Here, used as a family name.

Pericles — Classical Athenian leader

Phaiekians — Or Phæaceans. Mentioned in the *Odyssey*.

Philoxenia — Classical and Modern. Hospitality; literally, love of strangers

Spyros Nikolaides — Landowner. Appeared in "The Theban Fix".

Thebes — city in Greece

Theo — Works for Spyros Nikolaides. Appeared in "The Theban Fix".

Ti hode aner esti? — Classical. "What is this man?"

Xéne — Classical and Modern. Guest; foreigner (female).

Y'a sas — Modern. "Health to you." Hello. Katharevousa; notice the dative.

Y'a sou — Modern. "Your health." Hello. Demotic; notice the genitive.

Yadswiver — Scots, obsolete. Also from the *Flyting*. A yad is a mare.

Yanni — Works for Spyros Nikolaides. Appeared in "The Theban Fix".

Quotations from the Odyssey:

The Phaiekians' ships: VIII 557-561, VII 320-328

'If they saw him returned to Ithaka': I, 163

'Had I learned he was planning...': IV, 732-33

'Keep knowledge of this to yourself': II 356

'Until she misses me...': II 375

❄

KAREN ANDERSON has been published in *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Fantastic*, and *Galaxy*, besides various fan publications. Her short work, including collaborations with husband Poul Anderson, has been reprinted in **THE UNICORN TRADE** (Tor, 1984). They also collaborated on **THE KING OF YS**, a four-volume historical fantasy set in the late Roman empire (Baen, 1986-88). Her interests include medieval cooking, filk singing, and space development.

MARGARET ORGAN-KEAN, from Seattle, works as a tech writer and systems analyst in addition to her artwork assignments from *Cricket*, *MZBFM*, Wizards of the Coast (where she illustrated cards in the MAGIC deck, and was the artist and designer for all cards in The Great Dalmuti), and other card companies.

Unfortunately, issue #19 is sold out; this was the issue with "The Theban Fix" by Karen Anderson (the first story featuring Lucy Dickensheet and Chrysoleaina). However, you might be able to find a copy in a library or a friend's collection.

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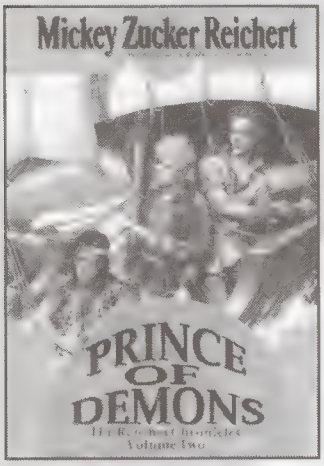

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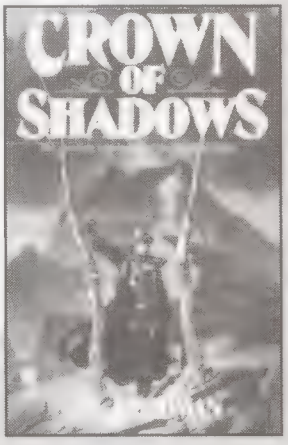

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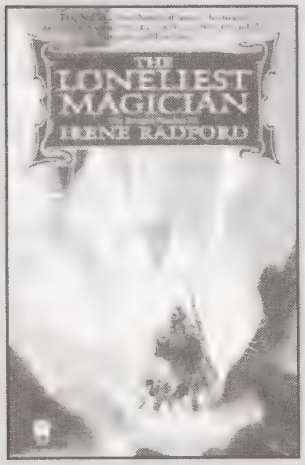

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A PAINTERLY EFFECT

by Ardath Mayhar

Judith's Journal:October

Grief does strange things to you, I have found. For the past month I have been painting frantically, as if by envisioning alien worlds and putting them on canvas I might create some context in which my children would still be alive.

Joshua, on the other hand, grieves by retreating into some distant place, inaccessible to anyone. He has taken guilt to his heart, as if even the most devoted father could prevent spinal meningitis from attacking his young. Nothing I can say reaches him. I would be lonely, if I were not so busy.

Our isolation, formerly treasured by all of us, has become a prison from which neither Joshua nor I expect (or want) to escape. Trapped here with our memories and our separate griefs, we have ignored the approach of winter. No wood is stacked beneath the deck to feed the hungry fireplace.

We will depend upon the oil furnace, this season, to keep from freezing when the deep snows come. I remembered to order the furnace tank filled, even in my state of shock. Joshua would never have done that, even if he began to stiffen in his chair.

In my studio, the extra oil heater fuming as it warms the place, I will be safe from self-indulgent agony. I will continue to hold death away by the power of my brush. For I find myself able to put into those fantastic landscapes the shapes of my children, distant, as yet, but recognizable. As long as I envision them so clearly they are not dead.

I tried to explain this to Joshua, but he stared at me as if he thought I might be mad. Perhaps I am, but at least I am not living as a mummy, immovable, inscrutable, shut away from everything and everyone. Even his mother, wracked with her own grief, could not stir him from his apathy.

I was glad when she left. Not that I do not admire and respect my mother-in-law, but as long as her pain was added to our own, in this house where our children lived, the burden was more than I could bear. My own loss is all I can deal with. She knew, I think, for when she found she could not wake her son from his withdrawal she returned home to her invalid daughter.

Now only Joshua and I live on the mountain, each of us encapsulated in a different shell of suffering. He does nothing except sit in his study, only leaving it to prepare a bit of food when he is hungry. I do the same; when I tried cooking for him he ignored the meals until they were ruined. So we move, most separately, quite silently, through the increasingly chilly days.

November

Although my work was always realistic before, landscapes, portraits, mental visions that I managed to convey to a painted surface, it is growing stranger. I have created gardens filled with flowers so alien that I doubt any could exist on earth. Landscapes have grown beneath my brush that might be found on some world with a sun of a different color, soil of very different qualities, and two shadowy moons that are visible by day.

Always, in the background, two children lurk, distant but coming closer with each painting. I knew from the beginning they were Julie and Eric, but now I can recognize their faces, peering through huge purple ferns or peeping from behind scarlet and ocher-streaked boulders. Both are solemn, but I believe I can see a hint of familiar mischief in both sets of gray eyes.

This should be incredibly painful, and yet it is not. Each morning when I rise from my tumbled bed, where sleep was interrupted by continuing nightmares, I am not weary but refreshed. The smell of linseed oil and turpentine, the feel of each brush between my fingers, welcomes me into a universe where all is well and no pain lingers.

As long as I paint, I am happy. Only when I clean the brushes, cover the palette, back away to examine my day's work do I begin to feel that terrible emptiness.

My agent, by the way, loves the new style, the new subjects, everything about my completely uncharacteristic work. The paintings are selling as quickly as I can complete them.

How can I bear to sell them? I won-

Artwork by Darlene Coltrain

der. Yet when I have done with each, I do not turn back to it, even for a glimpse. It is in the past, and every new beginning is a future that I cannot guess, a discovery I must make.

The snow has come, great drifts of it very early in the season. Our road has to be plowed regularly for the mailman to make his rounds. Soon the snow will be too deep, and we will not have mail until the next thaw.

I have no regrets. Enclosed here, with Julie and Eric emerging from those alien backgrounds, I can hardly wait for morning and the beginning of a new experience. Something strange and marvelous is going to happen!

December

We have been cut off for a week, now. The thaw in late November was followed by a blizzard worse than any I can recall since we moved to the mountain. Now the snow is piled to the eaves, only my shoveled path from the back door allowing me to see out over the cliff. Below, the valley is blindingly white, the drooping firs so heavily laden that you can hardly see hints of dark green needles beneath their hoods of snow.

The painting on my easel is also filled with snow. This is pale blue, and the strangely shaped monoliths pushing up through its layers are dark red, bruised gold, and purple-gray against that background. Two wool-capped and jacketed shapes in the middle ground seem to be building a snowman.

I am watching my hand closely, for it seems to be moving independently of my mind. Will this snowman have a wide, goofy grin made of black buttons? Julie and Eric invented their own 'trademark' in the snowman field. In a drawer of my desk those very buttons wait for a snowman that will never be formed again in this world.

Will they find black buttons in this new place? Or am I truly mad, as poor Joshua believes?

I completed the painting at noon. Outside, the wind has picked up again, hiding the valley in a swirl of blowing snow. The light is thin and grayish, but the painting seems to glow with a blue-white incandescence. The figures on either side of the snowman now face each other, their small profiles acutely sharp. Julie's stubby nose is red with the cold, and Eric's blond cowlick has escaped from his woolly cap and hangs, as usual, over his left eye.

The snowman grins at me with a curving row of black buttons, his expression incredibly smug and knowing.

If I am mad, then so be it. They are there, well and happy and still alive in some unknown time and place. I never believed in the rigid heaven that my mother tried to teach me, but I can believe in a world with two pale shadow-moons low in the sky, blue snow, red rocks, and black buttons for snowman noses.

I must go and tell Joshua.

I have just locked the door behind me, shutting away the still house, the low mutter of the furnace, and the memory of Joshua, sitting in his study beside the open window, frozen blue and stiff. He did it purposely, of course, unable to deal with our loss. I can sympathize, for if I were the kind to stop dead in my tracks and die of grief, I would have done something like it.

There is nothing to do until the roads open again, though I have used the ham radio to get in touch with the sheriff's department. They say to leave him where he is, window open to preserve his ... body. They are most concerned, but with the blizzard raging outside not even a helicopter can get to me. I would not risk a man's life on a snowmobile in such a storm, for I am in no danger.

The finished painting faces me, and suddenly I realize that it is still incomplete. My fingers are digging for brushes, uncovering the palette, dipping into dark blue before I can catch up with them.

My hand moves quickly, smoothing strokes against the pale stuff of the snow behind the snowman. A big shape, wearing a familiar Navy peacoat and a scarlet scarf, stands between my children, one mittened hand on each small shoulder. The thick blond curls blow in a stiff breeze, and Joshua's face is ruddy and happy.

All four, including the snowman, grin at me across intervening dimensions of time and space.

Their father is there, caring for his children as always. They are secure in that strange world, never to be harmed again by anything Earth holds.

Perhaps they will be there when I come, however long it may take. When the thaw comes, I shall go down the mountain and find a place in a sheltered valley. There I will paint and paint and paint, looking through oil and canvas into that distant world.

My agent will be gratified. There will be no worry about money, if the paintings continue to sell as they have until now. I will stay busy, despite my losses.

When I die, I hope I, too, will go to a world with twin moons, blue snow, red rocks, and three people whom I love very much.

If not, I will have had this much, and it is more than I ever expected.

❄

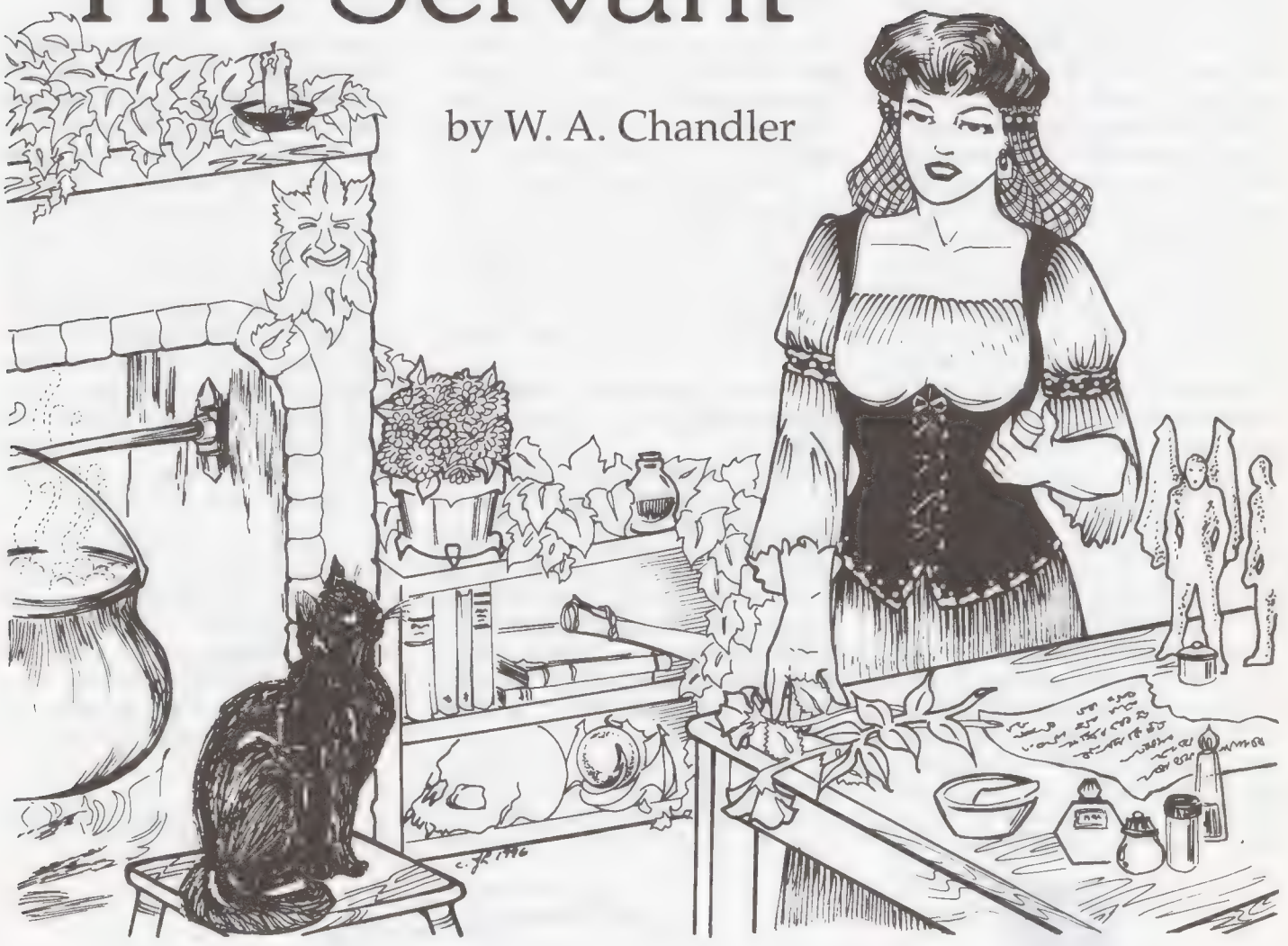
Ardath Mayhar was born in 1930, which seems to have been a vintage year for writers of sf, and almost immediately began composing verse with her father, which destined her to be a poet for many years. Only at the age of forty-three, however, did she begin writing fantasy and science fiction novels. Since 1973 she has sold thirty-six novels, many of which are in the imaginative genres. Westerns under the byline Frank Cannon, Mountain Man novels as John Killdeer (for the first six of the "Mountain Majesty" series), and four pre-Columbian Indian fantasies under her own byline are her most recent publications. A small press book, **SLEWFOOT SALLY AND THE FLYING MULE**, was released in May, 1995, and is now going into a second printing. A novel about travelers along the Oregon Trail will come out in March, 1996, from Berkley, under the byline Frances Hurst. She has four unpublished sf/f novels completed and waiting to be marketed and is presently working on three more historical (**not romantic**) novels.

Darlene Coltrain lives in Iowa and is a master of many creative arts, particularly illustration, beadwork, silver- and goldsmithing. She particularly enjoys working with pearls and opals.

Vote for your favorites — Cauldron ballot on p. 64

The Servant

by W. A. Chandler



Artwork by Julia Lacquement

The cat knew.

They always do, somehow. Don't ask me how or why, but they do.

This time, I was mixing up a vat of satisfyingly bubbly, aromatic stuff the recipe for which I had traded a mountain hermit for on the eve of the last full moon. Primordial stew, he had called it. He had assured me that the homunculi which the stuff could endow with life would be truly amazing little beasts in every sense. Intelligent, he said. Competent, he said. Useful, he said. Not like your average homunculi which, regardless of how much care you use when creating them, either drop dead within minutes or live out their months-long lives mostly falling down or just staring at you with beady little eyes, perhaps a bit of homunculus drool running down their chins, when you try to have them do something. Idiots. You see, Queen Gloriana had years ago outlawed the magical enslavement of natural sentient beings, claiming that the practice was inhumane to the beings enslaved and, given the general morale of enslaved classes, ultimately damaging to society as a whole. Since then, trying to find good witch's help has just been hell. Few volunteer for such a position, and you've already heard how useful homunculi generally turn out to be.

So of course I was interested in the hermit's recipe. The price was good, the ingredients were relatively common (if not completely savory), and the hermit himself had looked to be close on a century old, meaning he had probably been quite the witch in his own day before being exiled or threatened or otherwise forced out of the valley and up into the mountains. Believe me, a person doesn't spend multiple decades living alone in a hard hole in the rocks just because it's easier to meditate up here where things are quiet. Like most hermits, this one had undoubtedly found solitary mountain life preferable to whatever ungodly mess he had gotten himself into down below. Just what the mess was, I didn't ask. Bad form, you know.

Orson looked uncomfortable the moment I dropped the small clay figure of the homunculus into the torpidly boiling mixture. He had come bouncing cockily through the front door, a dead bird in his mouth to show me, and upon catching a whiff of the recipe, had dropped the bird without a second look and taken to the bookshelves, where he sat and stared ominously — or omnisciently — at both me and the stuff I was mixing. He didn't blink, just gazed at me in that calm, golden-irised, "Just what do you think you're doing" sort of cat way.

That look has always annoyed me, by the way. Combined with the bird guts that I would now have to clean up, it made me a little cross, and I stared back at Orson until he would blink, drop his gaze, and slink away. Only this time he didn't blink and slink. If anything, he seemed to stare even more intently before backing slowly into the darker recesses of the room, among the books and utensils and tables and whatnot, and his eyes the last time I looked were not on me, but the cauldron. Then he blinked — once — and disappeared.

I didn't pay much attention to Orson's behavior at the time. I well knew that cats have their own concerns and opinions about things, which don't always coincide with humans'. Besides, when I next glanced down into the pot, more was evident there than just the gray, bubbly stew.

There was a small face barely poking up above the bubbles, and it was staring at me. I stared back for a moment, and the little eyes blinked — once — before the face vanished again beneath the surface. Odd. But odd was good. If I'd wanted the same type of boring, stupid homunculus everyone else had, I wouldn't have tried this new recipe.

I waited for another minute or two, to see if the face would reappear on its own. When it didn't, I fished around with the big wooden ladle until I pinned something against the side of the cauldron, then I lifted the homunculus out and set it down on the table top. It sat there, covered in glop, and looked around. I wasn't afraid that it would run away. The stupid little things are like kittens or goslings in that they'll stick close to the first person they come in contact with — the witch who made them, usually — until the day they expire. The homunculi, not the witch.

I reached down with a large, rough cloth, and tried to wipe the homunculus off, but it pulled away abruptly. Great, I thought. A paranoid one. But then it reached out *on its own* and took hold of the cloth, then began to wipe itself clean of the sticky stuff it had been birthed in.

I was nearly breathless. Initiative? In a homunculus? Whoa. I leaned down closer to it.

"Hello," I crooned. "Don't be afraid."

It didn't answer me right away, but stared in my face again as it finished wiping itself off. It was a meticulous little thing. It even took care to dry off that hard-to-reach space between its wings. Not that it could fly; homunculi just look better if you give them wings. Aesthetics and all that. Then it held the cloth out for me to take. I tossed the cloth to one side.

"This is your home," I continued, gesturing slowly around. It still said nothing, but looked around at the cauldron, the furnishings of my dirt-floor cottage, the other clay homunculi lined up on the table, motionless, waiting to be dipped in the same stuff which now infused it with life. "I created you. I am your master."

The expression which crossed its face was like none I had ever seen on a homunculus before, but I had the distinct impression that, had I seen fit to give the thing eyebrows, they would have shot straight up.

It walked to the edge of the table and looked over. It flapped its wings experimentally and, before I could stop it, jumped off, wings beating the air.

It sat up with a look of surprise on its face, and I couldn't help but laugh. It didn't seem hurt by the fall, but when it abruptly jerked its head around at my laughter and stared straight into my eyes, frowning, I was astonished to realize that it was angry.

A homunculus with feelings? Double whoa.

It stood up and quite deliberately turned its back on me, and walked slowly around the middle of the room, looking. I watched it in amazement. Then it turned to me. "I am a slave," it said, and there was something about the way it made the statement that prompted me to confirm the fact.

"Yes."

"I see."

"Good," I said, and couldn't quite come to grips with just how incredible

Artwork by Julia Lacquement

this was. It was obvious that he could think; if he could follow instructions half as well as seemed likely, my labor problems were over. And if the other homunculi turned out like him, there was no telling what could be accomplished! "Now come here, please." I tapped on the table top, and the homunculus slowly walked over to where I could pick him up and set him on the table. He stood next to his as-yet-lifeless siblings and looked them over. "The first thing —" I began, but the homunculus interrupted me.

"And these?" he said, gesturing at the other homunculi.

I began to grow annoyed. Fun was fun, but if I wanted conversation I would have summoned an equal, not created a servant. "They will be your fellows, soon," I said. "But first you must learn *your* duties. They can worry about their own when the time c—"

"They will be slaves, too?"

I resisted the urge to thump him. "Yes."

"Why?"

This was getting truly silly. It was time to lay things on the line. "Because it is their nature, and yours. You are artificial creatures whose sole purpose is to serve. Your creation, your existence, your fate, you owe to me. For you, there is no other consideration than my wishes." I had bent down closer to the homunculus during this little speech and was looking right into his little black eyes, and he was staring right back at me again. "You will do as I tell you to do, and — uh — you will, um —" More than just this annoying backtalk, I realized quite suddenly that something about this homunculus was not what it should be. Whatever it was, I reasoned just as suddenly, it was no doubt related to the fact that I couldn't tear my eyes away from his, and that I was abruptly unable to move.

"I see," he said, and for the first time in my life I saw a homunculus smile. It wasn't inspiring. "Are you sure about all that?" he asked, still smiling. I couldn't answer; my lips, like the rest of me, refused to move. I felt even my lungs stop, and the weariness that washed over me told me that my heart, too, was slowing. Only my eyes could move, and they were locked onto the homunculus'. I knew instinctively that if I could look away from him, break that smarmy little evil gaze, his control over me would be broken. But I could not. Beyond him was the rest of the cottage, my bookshelves and furnishings and maps and decorations and whatnot, and all the other things that I had acquired or created over the years. But the central feature of this tableau of my accomplishments was this would-be servant, the homunculus, from whom I could not look away.

Without taking his eyes off mine, the homunculus sauntered forward a couple of steps and gestured to the other figures lying on the table. "I must thank you," he said, "for doing all this preliminary work for me. With their bodies already formed, it shouldn't be too much work to animate my comrades, and once there are enough of us, making even more should be just as easy." He reached forward and grasped the end of my nose firmly in one sharp-taloned little hand. It hurt. "Judging from the depth of that damned pot," he said, "there should be enough of that crap to animate at least a hundred of us, hmmm?" It was obvious to me now what that old hermit had done to get himself permanently exiled. Whether the hermit had discovered the effects of those stew ingredients himself, or learned them from someone — or, more likely, some*thing* — else, such a creature as this never should have been created. If the other homunculi turned out like him, there was no telling what they could accomplish.

It was then that Orson reappeared. Silent as cats can be when they want to, he came rushing out of the air like an arrow. He apparently had been perched on the very top of the nearest bookcase, and had the homunculus not been a creature of magic, Orson would have had him in an instant. Even as it was, the homunculus — warned by whatever supernatural senses were his — looked up and around at the last possible second, and leaped an incredibly high leap with a surprisingly loud screech, Orson landing empty-pawed right in my face, where the homunculus had been a split-second before. The homunculus had leaped clear off the table, and Orson followed right behind. The instant the homunculus broke eye contact with me, my muscles were my own again, and I clutched the table as I drew a tremendous, gasping breath.

It was like watching in miniature one of those contests where a heretic is pitted against a lion. In the middle of the dirt floor, the homunculus screeched and cursed and threatened as he jumped and ducked and scampered. Orson struck and twisted and lunged like a cat possessed, but in complete silence. I jumped up onto the table, out of the way.

The homunculus was magic, but he also was outclassed, and he knew it. There was no way Orson would gaze into his eyes long enough to be bound, and no way the homunculus could defeat Orson. Finally the homunculus changed tactics and leaped right at the cat, up and over his head and between flashing paws. Caught by surprise, Orson missed, and the homunculus shot out the door, cursing, his little clawed feet kicking up dust and his little wings flapping uselessly in fury. Orson did a one-eighty and was after him and out the door, too, in an instant.

I stood on the table, slack-jawed. When neither Orson nor the homunculus reappeared, I slowly climbed down and picked up my wits. Then I turned to the other clay figures I had ready to dip in the primordial stew and, one by one, tore them into tiny bits. I grabbed the cauldron of glop by the handle and lugged it outside, where I emptied it on the ground and then threw bucket after bucket of well water over it until the concoction was completely washed away.

I was back in the cottage, sitting and considering the value of suggesting to Gloriana that her anti-enslavement laws be broadened, when Orson returned. He came bouncing cockily through the front door, the dead homunculus hanging from his mouth to show me. He stood there for a moment, eyes nearly closed, basking in the glory of his conquest. Then he dropped the homunculus in an oozing heap on the floor and turned his attention to something else, padding calmly past me toward his favorite windowsill, into which he leaped and curled up in the sunlight without a glance at either me or the dead homunculus.

I looked around for something to grab the thing with — I wasn't about to touch it with my fingers — then finally used a stick to pick it up and carry it outside. After disposing of the homunculus, I cleaned up Orson's dead bird, which had lain there throughout the whole incident. This time, I didn't mind cleaning up the mess at all, and I'm sure that Orson knew.

Cats always do, somehow.

❄

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Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

The Serpent Within

by Terry McGarry

The lizards were grayish green and as long as a grownup's hand, with slim bodies and big, dark eyes. Lakshmi called them baby dragons.

"There are no dragons in India," said her uncle Pandi, who lived there all the time. "Only in China. And England."

Lakshmi spent every other summer in a village in Tamil Nadu, where her parents' families came from. Their ancient stone-and-teak house was cavernous and bare of furniture. Everyone sat on mats on the tiled floor under the ceiling fan. They ate idli with their fingers off banana leaves, and drank bottled water Lakshmi's parents had brought with them from America.

Since there were no cousins Lakshmi's age in the village, she spent a lot of time staring up at the painted Hindu avatars that marched along the top of the walls, or at the intricate animal carvings on the dark wooden pillars. At dusk, when the electric lights were turned on, the lizards would appear and lie in wait for the bugs the lights attracted.

Nobody killed the lizards — partly because they were cute and didn't bite, but mostly because they ate mosquitoes. It was considered very bad luck, of course, if one fell into the pot while you were cooking. Once or twice, lizards had scurried across Lakshmi, and their soft, smooth skin and tiny splayed feet felt like a feather tickling.

"Well, the nagas are a little like dragons," Uncle Pandi admitted, when she pestered.

"But nagas are snakes," Lakshmi said, remembering the story her mother had told her, of poisoned Bhima falling into the river, the realm of the nagas. The poison in their bites counteracted the poison he'd been given, and he got better, and fought back. But when a naga relative of his told the naga king that he was a good person, they all became friends and the nagas gave him nectar to make him as strong as a thousand elephants, and he could never be poisoned again.

"Many dragon myths come from myths of serpents," said her uncle. "Vishnu himself sleeps on Ananta, the serpent of eternity, but he is also known as a dragonslayer, because he defeated the evil serpent Kaliya." He stopped for a moment, looking thoughtful, not noticing that Lakshmi was at the same time rapt and uncomprehending. "And the Bhagavata Purana does mention that Kaliya has limbs — he even folds his palms."

Lizards, Lakshmi thought, looked an awful lot like four-legged snakes.

The central square of the house's main room was open to the sky. The air helped keep the house cool in the baking heat. When it rained outside, it rained inside, too, and drains carried the water away. When it was fair, Lakshmi often saw parrots on the sloping red-tiled roofs, and Uncle Pandi said that sometimes monkeys would come down into the center of the house, the way goats and dogs wandered in the front and had to be chased off.

This was where, Lakshmi was sure, she would see a full-grown dragon. The little ones had to go *somewhere* when they grew up. Maybe they went to China and England, and came back to visit, the same way Lakshmi's family did. Only they sprouted wings instead of getting on airplanes.

She waited through the heat and the monsoon. But no smooth pale head dipped down from the sky, no great dark eyes looked in to greet her. When the summer ended, and her parents wouldn't let her take any lizards home with her, she said a solemn good-bye to all of them.

"Now we're friends," she told them. "It's okay if you grow up while I'm gone. I know when I come back you'll come back, too."

They returned to India when Lakshmi was eight. This time she and her parents spent a couple of days with friends

in Madras before taking the overnight train to Karaikudi, the closest station to their village.

The first day, they went shopping. The Victoria Technical Institute sold beautiful handicrafts at low prices, and while her parents looked at carven tables and batik scarves and paintings of Ganesha, Lakshmi wandered the rows of statues. Jade elephants with tiny elephants carved inside them, dancing gods and goddesses ... but not a dragon to be found.

As they walked out with their purchases wrapped in Tamil newspapers and brown paper, they were surrounded by beggars, some standing, some crawling. Mom held Lakshmi close, but still a boy glued himself to her, hoarsely whispering "Mah, mah," give, give. His hands were turned around completely backward, and in the empty palms were circular imprints, as if coins had been pressed there too hard. His skin was a funny color, kind of pale. It reminded Lakshmi of the lizards' skin. Did he hoard his few coins, guard them as jealously as a dragon?

Once they'd found their driver and were safely inside their rented white Ambassador, her mother pressed a fifty-paise coin into one of the boy's reversed hands, which he had stuck through the open window. The others — a woman in a ragged sari, holding her baby up to them like a doll; a man who had no hands at all — crowded closer then, rolling their eyes, croaking "Mah, mah," but the car pulled out into the chaotic press of traffic on the Anna Road, and Lakshmi could feel her mother sigh. Was it because she, too, had noticed the lizardlike pallor of their skin?

Later they went for a walk on the beach with their Madras friends. The Bay of Bengal lapped at the twelve miles of beachfront with a warm tongue, caressing Lakshmi's ankles when she took off her slippers to wade in.

She thought about how Vasuki, a king of the nagas, had been used as the cord when the gods and demons churned the ocean to make ambrosia. Lakshmi always thought of a giant jump rope when she heard that story. Vasuki was so stretched and battered by the churning that flames and black vapors came out of his mouth. The vapors became clouds and the flames became lightning, and rain fell and refreshed the tired gods, just as the spray refreshed Lakshmi now.

There was an odd bundle up ahead, and she was curious what might have been left on the beach like that. As she got closer, for a little while it almost looked like a person — a man, with no clothes on, his limbs all twisted at funny angles, the remnants of a white dhoti fluttering underneath him. There were little crabs running all around his body. She began to be afraid, just as Mom called her name with the false calmness that signified urgency.

Then she realized what it was, and her heart leaped: a dragon! A young dragon, curled up asleep on the warm sands, already the size of a man, smooth gray-green skin darkened to brown, its white wings not strong enough yet for flight and fluttering about it as if in practice.

Lakshmi rushed to her mother. "Leave it alone," she told her, so quietly that the surf almost swallowed the sound. "It's just sleeping."

Her mother glanced at her sharply, but seemed more than willing to turn back toward the road, Lakshmi's hand grasped tightly in her own. Lakshmi didn't tell her it was a dragon; surely Mom knew that already, from the funny way she was looking at Dad and the other couple.

That night, tucked up in the bottom bunk of their sleeper compartment, with coal smoke on the rushing wind and the rhythm of wheels over railroad ties, Lakshmi listened to the lullaby of the lonely train whistle, and wondered, if she could just stay awake a little longer, whether she would hear wingbeats overhead.

For all the chaos of its roads — an insane weave of cars, trucks, bicycles, autorickshaws, mopeds, ox-drawn carts, pedestrians, strolling cattle, overflowing buses — and for all its shocking blend of poverty and affluence, India was a slower, more spiritual place than where Lakshmi lived. Sometimes it seemed the only real place there was — as if her life in America were a dream she woke from only once every two years.

Lakshmi was sure she would see a full-fledged dragon on their trip her tenth summer. When she was little, she had seen the babies; when she got a little older, she'd seen a half-grown one, albeit asleep. Now she was practically grown-up herself — and the lizards she had talked to four years ago were certain to have grown up, too.

The family was supposed to drive deep into the south, to a famous temple. But Mom and Dad seemed worried, and she overheard them talking, late one night, about Tamil separatists and terrorism, something to do with Sri Lanka. She almost got up to tell them not to be afraid, that the naga-dragon would swoop down from the sky and save them if they needed it. But they didn't like her talking about dragons. It was annoying not to be able to ask questions — even Uncle Pandi had become closemouthed on the subject — but there was nothing she could do.

To her dismay, they cut the visit short. Lakshmi sat miserably in the Madras airport, tired after the train ride, feeling hot and sick. People pressed in all around them, especially on line, when leaving an inch of space meant that someone might horn into the queue ahead of you. It was heaven to settle into their seats at last. Lakshmi loved the sensation of flight. But ten minutes went by, then twenty, and still the plane did not take off.

"Crew, please prepare the passengers for deplaning," the voice on the PA suddenly said. "The passengers will be deplaned immediately."

Everyone in the compartment groaned. Some mechanical problem, no doubt; they would have to sit in the airport for another hour, and then come back on board.

People got up slowly, started to reach for carry-on bags. "Please leave your hand luggage on board," the PA said, "and proceed to the terminal as quickly as possible."

Mom pushed Lakshmi ahead of her into the aisle, her hands too tight on Lakshmi's shoulders. People were barely shuffling forward. "Move faster, please," the flight attendants said. Their voices had that same forced calmness that Mom's did when she was scared.

When they passed the stairs to the first-class compartment, Lakshmi saw the captain — she could tell it was him from the special uniform. His face was dead white.

That was when Mom and Dad really started moving. They had reached the passageway to the terminal. Dad scooped Lakshmi up and threaded through the ambling passengers at a trot, Mom right behind him, as if they were late for a show in Manhattan. In the waiting area, people were pressed against the windows, staring at the air-

plane, wondering what was going on. Mom and Dad went all the way over to the other side of the lounge, as far as they were allowed to go, back to the metal detectors and the curtains behind which they had earlier been frisked.

Lakshmi heard a man in a security uniform say something about a bomb threat. Sure enough, the PA system was soon announcing that at midnight an anonymous call had been received saying there was a bomb aboard flight SQ302, and it would detonate at 12:30 a.m. Lakshmi looked down at her watch. It was 12:15.

First she was scared, mostly because Mom and Dad kept telling her everything would be okay, even as Dad hunkered down to shield her body with his. Then, suddenly, she was furious. The plane was still there, and nobody was telling those people to get away from the window!

She strained to see over her father's shoulder. Clearly no one believed the bomb was real. They were just going to wait until 12:30 passed, and then search the plane, and probably put everyone back on it again. Mom was saying something about not getting back on, and the hell with the bags. Lakshmi looked at her watch again. It was 12:20. What were they *thinking?*

She shifted again to peer past Dad's head. She could just see down an aisle between the rows of seats, to a gap in the crowd at the window. The plane was a dark gray blur outside. For a moment, Lakshmi wanted to cringe, as the time ticked by in her head.

But then she realized what was going to happen. Just as Security was clearing the people away from the window at last, she could see a great winged shadow against the sky, its deep eyes even darker shadows in its enormous head. It settled softly onto the top of the plane, backwards, and wrapped its long legs around it, hooking toes behind the landing gear. And then it spread its wings — so wide that their tips nearly brushed the window she looked through — and began to flap. Like a giant sail that could create its own wind, the naga-dragon towed the plane slowly but steadily away from the terminal building, out over the runway, out into the faraway field.

And away from them.

When plane and dragon were swallowed by the darkness, Lakshmi relaxed, and looked at her watch again. 12:29. Dad put his arm around Mom, where she crouched next to him, and together they held her tight. Lakshmi braced for the roar of the explosion.

But it never came. There was no sigh of relief among the passengers as 12:30 came and went. None of them had believed in the bomb. And none of them had seen the dragon, either, as near as she could tell; they would have been remarking on it, amazed at the intervention of a mythical beast.

Lakshmi said nothing. Perhaps it was meant to be a secret, between her naga-dragon and her. Even when the PA woman said, "As you can see, we have towed the aircraft to a safe distance. Our bomb experts will be inspecting it shortly. We appreciate your patience," — even then, Lakshmi held her peace.

It would probably only scare people to know the truth. Grownups just didn't like to discuss dragons. She hoped she would never be *that* grown-up.

Later on, after she'd finished the uncomfortable business of going to the

Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

bathroom over one of the seatless squat-toilets that looked like big keyholes, Lakshmi saw a lizard, up by the fluorescent light. She wasn't surprised; she knew they liked bathrooms.

"Do you know what your big cousin just did?" she whispered to it — quickly, not wanting to be interrupted by someone coming in. "I know what you are now, little naga. I learned about caterpillars and butterflies in school. You're like a caterpillar now. But give it a few years. You'll be a beautiful dragon."

She started to go to the door, then paused. "*Was* there a bomb? Did your cousin find a way to keep the bomb from going off? Well, I guess you can't tell me. It's okay. But please, if you get a chance, maybe after you've gotten your wings ... could you say thank you to him for me?"

For many years Lakshmi did not return to India. Her parents went a few times, but her summers were filled with camp, boys, summer jobs, and there was no room for dragons.

Yet part of her heart stayed in Tamil Nadu, and there were often dragons in her dreams. And often she had nightmares in which she was in India but urgently had to get home, and couldn't, or in which she *was* home, but had forgotten something terribly important back in India. Which was the real world? The land of dreamy, introspective afternoons, when time ceased to pass, when there was only you, your thoughts, and the spreading shade of a coconut tree under the blistering sun? Or this land of rushing events, each tumbling over the next like whitewater in a river's rapids?

Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

It was when disturbing things happened that she got an inkling that both worlds were real — and that both were dreams, reflecting each other endlessly. No dragon saved Yofi when the dog was hit by a car, but Lakshmi, when she found his furry body, for a moment thought she saw wings, scales. Through her sobs over losing her first steady boyfriend, she could almost hear the throb of wingbeats in the dark air. And when she did go back to India at last — in her senior year of high school, because Uncle Pandi was dying — she saw the young dragon again as she watched the old man sleeping in the hospital. For just a moment, there were no tubes, no monitors; just the gleam of dark eyes in a wedge-shaped head, the web of veins in leathery, membranous wings.

"There *are* dragons in India, Uncle," she whispered to him softly, after the winged part-snake, part-lizard had detached itself from his still form and risen up and out of sight. "And in America, too. There are dragons wherever there are people who need to see them." And then she let herself cry, because the nurses had come running, and her uncle was gone.

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Alan Gutierrez lives in Sedona, Arizona, with his wife and daughter. He is a well-known cover artist, having recently appeared on such diverse publications as *Deep Space Nine* novelizations and *Popular Mechanics*.

Snow like Wool, Frost like Ashes

by Tracey S. Rosenberg

When winter came to the forest, snow softened and encased all it found, as if the sturdy pines could endure only by shivering within their white cloaks. The snow cradled nests and closed off entrances to underground dens; when flakes fell from the sky, languorous and calm, they settled in layers to blanket the entire forest. The first snowfall gleamed as sunlight washed its hills.

Anya cried at the sight.

The advent of winter meant rubbing her hands to reduce the swelling of chilblains, and chipping ice from the water bucket only to find that not a drop of liquid remained; above all it meant her mother's mourning renewed, as if the death of the world could only be equaled by remembrance of the death of her husband and three children.

Anya could hardly recall life in a village; her only memories were the sensation of many bodies crowding into a cold room, and the wailing of women's voices rising to a full keening cry. But she knew that she and her mother had once lived in contact with other folk. She could not imagine why her mother had retreated to a mean cottage, formerly used by alchemists who had required the solitude for uninterrupted experimentation, nor why her mother spent every winter evening weeping as she knitted or stitched by the fire, recounting the same story so often that its edges had smoothed in Anya's mind — how first the littlest girl had been stricken by the illness, followed by the three elder children and then, inconceivably, by the father; how all five had shivered and sweated through the fever's throes; how, all too quickly, only Anya was alive, as the bodies of her father and siblings rested on the stony hillside to allow their souls to cross beyond the ocean.

In summer, the burden of grief eased; often Anya heard her mother's harsh voice soften into a lilt, or saw her plodding step lighten as she set out to the main road, there to trade her handiwork for whatever foodstuffs the traveling merchants could offer. But every year on winter's eve, all joy vanished, leaving an old woman mourning by the fire.

Once, her mother had told stories and fables by the hearth, during the long winters when even poets could not travel; once, the first frost had been a joyous event, a time spent huddled around the fireside listening to tales of the winter prince. He slumbered during the golden summers and bright autumns, and awakened only after the leaves had floated away from their branches. With a wave of his hand he caused the snow to gather and fall; when he sneezed, winds roared across the drifts. He had a name but Anya did not know it, and he lived deep in a cavern, where he slept undisturbed, for a mortal could only find him if he desired to be found.

"Anya! Fetch branches for the fire. Hurry, now."

The misery had crawled back into her mother's voice, and as Anya poked through the snow cover to locate loose branches, she vowed to find the winter prince and beg him to refrain from sending snow. If he allowed for even one winter free of the white burden of grief, mayhaps her mother would forget.

By pinching herself, Anya fought sleep until her mother had begun snoring in the far corner. She had no need to dress, for she slept in all her clothes, but she pulled her mother's shawl from its peg. She had to tie up its fringes to keep from tripping over them.

Two of the moons shone fully, and

the snow glowed, slashed through by shadows of the gaunt trees. Anya hurried away from the main road, pretending that she had a clear direction to travel, when she knew that in reality she did not. Towards the moons, she thought; the souls of the lost journeyed towards the moons, and many gods as well. The winter prince was surely a god, for did he not control the snow and bring winter?

So she stumbled towards the moons, over roots hidden by deceptive whiteness and through latticed branches that stung her face.

As her pace slowed from weariness, she thought about the winter prince. He was a lad, no older than her eldest brother had been at his death, and strolled through his domain more cheerful than a lord surveying his estate. He left no prints in the snow, for the snow accepted him as itself, covering all his tracks.

Anya forced her feet onwards, for she knew that to sleep in the snow was to die. But after the moons withdrew behind sallow curtains, only false light guided her, light which gleamed far ahead but which revealed no path.

She sank to her knees; her feet could step no further. Only a moment's rest, and then she would continue; only a moment, to rest in the comfort of the snow bed. She had never known how warm snow could be...

"Awaken, child, awaken; such a place is not for you."

She was dreaming the creamy voice, smooth as fresh milk, yet as sharp at its edges as shards of ice.

"Awaken."

She squeezed her eyes tighter.

A warm pressure on her hand gave her courage to look. Her sight fell on a young man, golden-haired and fair of complexion.

"You would have died had I not found you."

The voice flowed around her, holding her tighter than any woven blanket.

"You must not walk abroad in snowtime with such ragged shoes, nor lacking a warm wrap."

"Winter prince?" Her voice had frozen to a small nugget in her throat.

" 'Tis I indeed. None other could have saved you. Were you seeking me?"

She nodded, noticing her surroundings. The whiteness which she had taken for the bleached sky was in fact a firm surface over her head; crystalline snow flakes shone as clearly as if each had been individually placed. She lay not on a bed of snow and decayed pine cones but on packed earth covered with her mother's shawl. The familiar sight in such a strange place almost made her burst into tears.

"I came out to find you," she told him hoarsely.

He smiled. "Many try. Sent by the poets, or mayhaps poets themselves, carrying their hymns of beauty for my creations. But you do not wear a poet's cloak. No matter — when I saw you peacefully asleep, I knew you sought me." He settled back.

Anya knew she had been mistaken. This was no young man full of innocent hope. Smugness sat in every gesture — in the bend of his arm, clothed in white feathers, and in the tilt of his head as he awaited her praise.

"I came to ask — to ask if you might

Artwork by Rob Alexander

stop sending the snow, just for a little while —"

"How dare!" The prince recoiled. "Who sent you, ungrateful? A chit of a lass mocking me. I should have left you to your fate —"

"Please," she begged. " 'Tis not for myself but for my mother. She grieves when the snow comes. I only thought if you might stay it for a year, mayhaps she'll not be so unhappy."

"*Unhappy*? From snow?"

Anya reached forward and held onto his arm, feeling the warmth of skin even through the woven feathers.

"My father and my brothers and sister died; 'tis only myself left, and her. 'Twas snowing when they died, so she sees the snow and thinks of them, and weeps grievously for hours. During summer she is often happy, but never in winter."

The winter prince's face was a mask, frozen without comprehension. Miserably, Anya drew back from him and covered her shoulders with her mother's shawl, wishing that she had not been such a fool. Now he would cast her bones into his well, or leave her to wander until she died from frostbite, and her mother would be alone ....

"Unhappy," the prince breathed. "My snow brought misery. I have always bestowed snow like wool, granting it to cover and comfort; never did I realize that unknowingly I scattered frost like ashes, choking those already bowed by woe."

Anya began to cry as tears of failure swelled up inside her.

"No, no, child. Do not be weeping. You have given me a great gift."

"Gift?"

The prince brushed her cheeks with his sleeve; the down caressed her. "Gift of knowledge, child. I had never known that my bequest held such a dangerous element. I saw only the beauty and I did not know that others could not see as I did."

Anya began to protest that not everyone felt sadness from snow, but he enveloped her in his arms; she relaxed completely into the melting softness, closing her eyes as a whirling rush of wind surrounded her. When the blast of sound subsided and the pressure around her fell away, she found herself standing outside the hut, with her mother rushing towards her.

"Where have you been? All day I've been waiting for you..."

Her voice faltered; Anya, turning, saw the winter prince standing behind her. Sunlight bronzed his curls and dazzled the feathers of his cloak, but his smile eclipsed all other brightness.

"Your daughter has bestown upon me a gift I had never imagined. I wish to repay her by granting what she most desires."

He stepped forward and, taking her mother's hand, led her into the forest.

Anya followed, scarcely able to believe as the winter prince described his creations. The perfect miniature beauty of a single snowflake caught on the tip of a branch; the veins of a frozen leaf, etched against a background of autumn-blazed orange; a vast tract of freshly fallen snow, unmarred save for tiny bird-tracks, sparkling and shining. Her mother's face brightened with each revelation, and her grief slowly melted away as snow did after each frozen season, allowing the joy of spring to take its rightful place.

When they once again stood before their cottage, Anya's mother crouched down and drew Anya into the circle of her arms. "Mayhaps it is time to rejoin the village once more ... poor child, I sacrificed you to my grief."

" 'Twas my grief also," Anya whispered, remembering the father and siblings she would never meet again; but the time for deepest sorrow was over.

The winter prince bowed towards Anya. "Once again, I offer my gratitude."

The last Anya saw of the winter prince was a shiver of the feathered cloak; the last she heard, a faint "thank you" in a voice as soft as a snowflake on her cheek.

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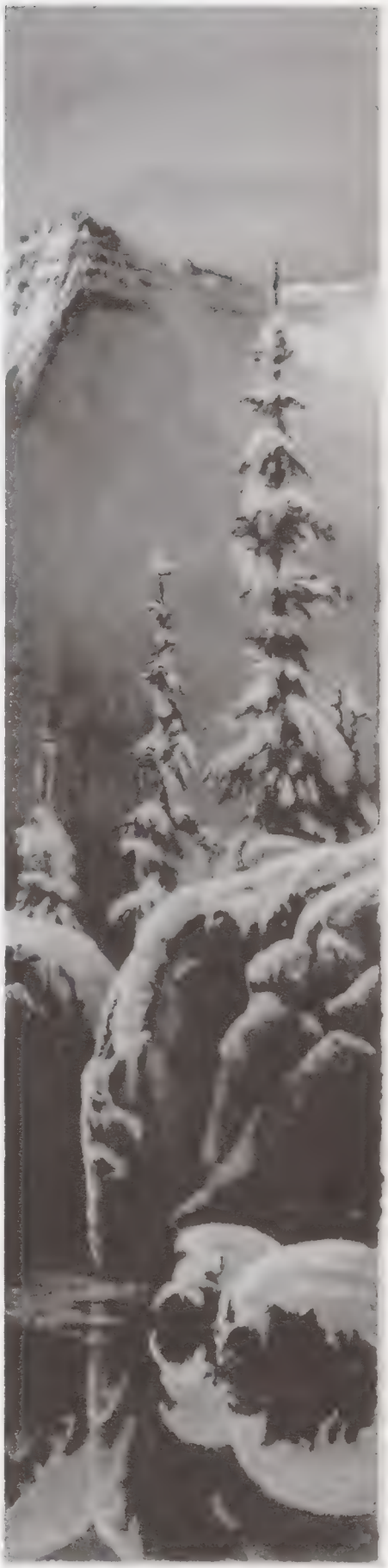
Tracey S. Rosenberg is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley. She is currently at Oxford, pursuing independent research on Victorian literature and finishing up her second novel. "Snow Like Wool, Frost Like Ashes" was written in a hotel room, when she decided to write a story inspired by a verse randomly chosen from the ever-present Gideon Bible. In the past six years she has lived in seven different cities and hopes that one day she will spend an entire year at a single address. She isn't counting on it, though.

Rob Alexander lives in Seattle with his wife Susan, also an artist, and has been voted a Cauldron award for past work in these pages. He has illustrated Magic cards and book covers.



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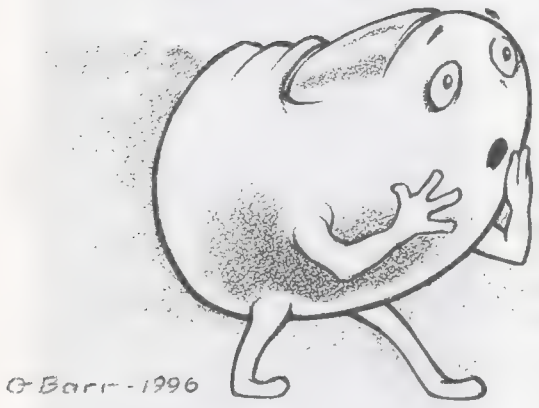


TOE HEAVEN

by Marion Zimmer Bradley

Scheduled operation: third toe, left foot, elderly diabetic female age 66. Successful without incident...

Toe had no idea what was happening to her, nor how — with no eyes or sight in the ordinary sense at all — she was climbing a long staircase, through a long tunnel, then, after a long time (or so it seemed to her), she found herself in the shadow of a high Gate, faint shadows of pearl drifting around her.

There was a grumbling voice. Above her, a great shadow loomed over her crouching body on the ground and she knew (not knowing how) that the voice of Saint Peter spoke to her, searching her out where she crouched outside in the shadow.

"This is very irregular," the ancient voice grumbled. "How dare you present yourself here alone? Without your —" he hesitated, "Without the rest of you?"

"Without my..." she, too, contemplated the exact word. "Without the rest of me? I don't know, I just found myself on the road here."

"Without the rest of you," confirmed the Saint. "I do not know where you belong, but there must be a place here set apart for you. We had a wooden leg here once —"

"Let me show you where to go," said an elderly and gentle voice. The old Saint glared.

"Ah — er — Miss Bernhardt," Saint Peter said in his old and grumbling tone. "If you will take responsibility–"

"To be sure I will," the leg murmured in an obscure accent. "Come with me —"

Toe could not guess where she was going. She trotted along at the side of the shapely leg in its fine dark silk stocking, while the leg said in an irritated mezzo voice, "I really think the old fellow is getting past his work. It is so hard on you little people. I should not have to come and handle it this way. But I know it happens; I have had to do it before."

She murmured — she did not remember speaking before, but then there had never been anything she had to speak about before so what did she know about it? — "I'm sure I'm very grateful, Miss —"

"Never mind," the leg positively cooed at him. "Here, I think this is the place for you. There was a war some years ago and a great many of your kind — toes and fingers, all you little fellows —"

"It's most kind of you, Miss —"

"Oh, not a bit of it, very glad to help." And the leg was no longer at her side; but, in a rainbow-lighted space before her, a great number of separate toes and fingers were lounging about.

One of the fingers was very long and aristocratic; it was stained and looked bruised. It had evidently been telling something like its life story, and it did not pause now in its account.

"And so I lost almost all my toes and fingers on the way down the mountain," the long finger was saying with a very thick French accent. "Conditions were terrible in those little Nepalese towns — we were running out of medical supplies by then and everything was rather rough and ready. We'd stop in some little Indian town, and do the amputation with just a little alcohol — no morphine —"

Toe shuddered and said aloud "How gruesome!"

"Oh, not at all," broke in one onlooker. "Why, he loves those old stories, he's told them over and over. They're the only thing he has that's in any way distinctive. But come in and tell us how you lost your — er — the rest of yourself, sister?"

"It's not at all interesting," Toe said. "I was careless, that's all, and the toe got infected. I'd much rather hear your stories."

"And so you shall," said the aristo-

cratic finger. "You'd be amazed what tall tales toes tell to explain why it really wasn't their fault! According to them, somebody always has it in for them. Anyone who is really willing to take responsibility for what happened to him ... it's very refreshing."

"Oh well," Toe said, deprecatingly. "The doctor asked how I felt about losing a toe, and I said I might well have lost the foot — and anything was better than that."

"Splendid," said some one. "First, have a drink."

It was, to her astonishment, the very first time that she drank alone, unaided by mouth or any other parts. *Why, my very first drink. Coming of age at last!* She had no idea how she drank it.Well, this was heaven, after all. The drink was wonderful. Someone offered her another, but she refused, not, after all, wishing to be drunk — or even tipsy — or to behave in a disorderly manner.

"Do tell me some of your stories, m'sieur," Toe prompted, and he grinned. "My name is Maurice, and this is really all you need to know," he said pleasantly. "I am sure you will not be here very long," he added with a shadow of a grin. "It is unlikely your owner will choose to come here, instead of where old Peter is presiding ..."

"There's really nothing to tell." Toe said, hesitating. "I'd really much rather hear some of your stories."

Two grubby, blackened little fingers, clinging together, said "There's nothing very unusual about us. It was July 4th and we thought it would be all right to light a couple of firecrackers. Papa did it and nothing ever happened to him. Then there was a great big bang and we were here, and we still are here, and that's all."

"Except," said the other one, "that we're not very sure where here is."

A voice echoed through the room. "Miss Bernhardt — main gate, please."

There was a silence, and then an indignant stir began to run through the room. "Well! Did you ever hear anything like that!"

"What happened?" Toe asked.

It was Maurice who answered. "I never heard of such a thing: that French woman — she took her wooden leg to heaven with her!"

"Oh well," murmured Toe. "I suppose she was used to it —"

"Not her," muttered Maurice. "Just that it made her seem so brave and distinguished —"

"That's quite all right, said the Frenchwoman's leg bravely. "I'd rather be here with all you little guys anyhow. The company's better — more honest."

Toe cried out, "Three cheers for Miss Bernhardt!" and they all knew she meant the brave leg, not the actress who had rejected it. It was so nice to be here, she thought where no one ever misunderstood anything.

Bernhardt's leg accepted the round of cheers and called for another round of drinks. Toe looked round at her comrades. She really did not mind if she had to spend all eternity here after all. ❄

Marion Zimmer Bradley edits this magazine. She is perhaps best known for her bestselling novels **MISTS OF AVALON** and **THE FOREST HOUSE**. She also wrote the Darkover series of sf novels and edits the **SWORD AND SORCERESS** anthology series for DAW.

George Barr made his first professional art sale in 1960. He has been providing illustrations for *FANTASY Magazine* since its first issue. He won the Hugo Award as Best Fan Artist in 1968 and has been nominated in both Fan Artist and Professional Artist categories. He was Artist Guest of Honor at the 1994 Worldcon in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Artwork by Cat Walker

Stirring the Ashes

by Mary Ann Schenk

I hid in the shrubbery until I was sure they had gone by. The street is no place for a girl, alone, at night. Ever since the riots. But I had killed three people, and I had to find out how.

It was just two men, going home drunk. When they were gone, I crept out and kept going. Only two more blocks. But no cover for the last half of it, just a long stretch of concrete and weeds, right up to the library wall. I stood in the shadows and listened to the silence.

It seemed safe enough. I slipped past the bushes and sprinted across the last block. I flattened myself against the library wall and listened.

Nothing.

I edged around to the back of the building, away from the street. Luck was with me; there was a broken window facing the alley. I picked out the last shards of glass and scrambled inside.

It was a shock, even though I was expecting it. Mutilated books lay in heaps on the floor, pages ripped out, the spines torn and broken. Some of them lay in blackened heaps, the bindings burned beyond recognition, white ashes where the pages used to be.

The books I was looking for would have been kept out of sight. I walked past the open shelves and went downstairs to the stacks.

It took three nights to search the stacks by candlelight. Not three nights in a row, of course; I could never escape so often. Aunt Kaela was too careful of me for that. But during the next two weeks I looked at every book in the basement.

I knew, even before I started, that it would be useless. The rioters had been there, too.

But there were still shelves of undamaged books on the main floor.

I came upstairs. Moonlight filtered in through the slatted blinds, hanging drunkenly askew at the windows. I did not dare straighten them, and I was not at all sure that the shelves that were still standing would shield the light from my candle. I knew what would happen if anyone saw my light and found me here. I almost gave up then.

But they had been so young, those three boys.

I shouldn't have been outside at all, after dark, even so close to home, where it should have been safe. They came out of nowhere.

They had knives.

I tried to run, but they caught me. They were laughing and saying terrible things. Then I couldn't hear them any more, because of the buzzing in my ears. I felt heat rising under my skin, and everything went dark.

When I could see again, the knives were pools of slag in the street.

The boys were worse.

Then I knew what I was. And now I had to find out what to do about it. I looked outside through the crooked blinds once more, and then I picked my way to the back of the library. I lit my candle and began to search.

It took two more nights, but finally I found them. The librarian was either very clever or very careless. The books were where no one who wanted them would think to look. They were in plain sight, in the section of the library reserved for romance novels. Stuffed in between **MAGICAL ENCOUNTER** and **MAGICAL SPRING**, I found them — **MAGICAL SECRETS** and **MAGICAL SPELLS**, by the great witch Kanamarra.

I took them both, and tucked them into my carryall bag, and slipped out through the window into the alley behind the building.

I heard a sound behind me and spun around to find two policemen watching me. One of them smiled.

I didn't like that smile.

They started coming toward me. I backed up as far as I could, but the library was behind me. The brick wall was cool and gritty under my hand.

"This isn't what you think," I said.

The policemen glanced at each other. One of them, the smiling one, said, "Oh, I don't know. I think it looks like another victim of random gang violence."

My heart stopped beating, then pounded hard in my chest. The other policeman shook his head. "It's a shame," he said, "the things that can happen to a girl, alone, after dark."

I wished desperately that I had read the books before I left the library. If only I knew a spell to make myself invisible, or to strike them blind and fill their minds with forgetfulness. But I didn't. I pressed back against the brick wall, and began to feel heat building up inside of me.

"Oh, no," I whispered. "Oh, no, please. No."

The other policeman smiled, too. "Listen to that. She said no. I guess she doesn't know what happens to people who don't cooperate with the police."

The buzzing started in my ears and grew to a roar. My skin began to tingle and my vision darkened. The last thing I saw was the look of utter astonishment on their faces.

I don't know how long it was before I came to myself again. When I did, I shouldered my carryall and stepped carefully around the two smoking heaps of ashes, and slipped silently away through the alleys and deserted streets.

When I was safe in my room, I opened my carryall bag and took out the two forbidden books. My hands were shaking almost too hard to hold them. I shoved **MAGICAL SPELLS** under my mattress. That could wait. I opened **MAGICAL SECRETS** in my lap and began to read.

It was slow reading. Kanamarra's writing was hard to follow. By the time I finished one of her sentences, I had forgotten the beginning of it. But I kept on. I needed to know.

Kanamarra said that magic was hereditary. Actually, what she said was, "It is a fact no longer in dispute among those learned in matters of descendance and genealogy that the aptitudes critical to the application of the craft called 'magic' tend to inhere in the female line."

So, if your mother is a witch, then you might be one, too.

I hardly remember my mother. She

Artwork by Cat Walker

left before I was six, when people first turned against witches.

"I don't want to leave you, Alie," she told me, "but it will be safer here for you if I am gone." And then she put a brown hood over her golden hair, and walked out of my father's house.

The relatives said unkind things about what they called her desertion of her family, and they said it just proved that you couldn't put your trust in a witch. That was when Aunt Kaela came to live with us, to take care of my father and me, and I have tried to be grateful to her. I didn't see my mother again until the day they burned her.

Kanamarra also said that some magic is involuntary, a reflex, like jumping at a loud noise. Even if she is completely untrained, a witch will use magic to protect herself if she is threatened. In fact, the earliest training a witch receives is not how to cast spells and work magic; it is how to control her magic.

That was what I needed to learn.

My mother could have helped me. She would have taught me how to leash the fire inside of me, and I would never have had to kill anyone. But she was gone, and my witchfire was untamed.

It's strange that witches have no defense to fire. As Kanamarra said, you can't fight fire with fire. Well, what she actually said was ... never mind. But that's why they burn the witches.

Because they can. When they catch them.

Like they burned my mother.

Like they'll burn me.

I have decided to leave. My father is leaving, too. He looked at me strangely when I told him I was going, and why, but he only said that there was nothing left to keep him here, and that he would go with me. Aunt Kaela doesn't know; she's sleeping now. I have food, clothes, and some money in my carryall, in addition to Kanamarra's books. My father carries extra food, and seeds for potatoes and squash and such, foods that grow easily and keep well. We hope to find others like ourselves, witches and people who care about them, but if we don't we should still be able to grow enough food to take us through the winter, if it isn't a hard one.

We're ready now. Just a man and his daughter walking down the street. Nothing that should make anyone suspicious.

I've been practicing Kanamarra's exercises, and I think I can control the fire now. With any luck, if anyone questions us, my father will be able to talk our way out.

As we walk I feel eyes on my back. I touch my father's sleeve. "Someone is watching us."

"Let them watch, Alie," he says. "It's all right, as long as they don't try to stop us."

I hear footsteps behind us. We keep walking. My father tries to reassure me by squeezing my hand.

"Where are you going?" I recognize Aunt Kaela's harsh voice. "Where are you taking Alie?"

We stop walking. She comes straight up to my father. "Where are you taking her? At night? And why?"

She looks into my carryall bag. The books are deep, out of sight, but she sees the clothes and food.

"There's only one reason you would be sneaking out with her in the middle of the night. The girl's a witch, like her mother. Isn't she?"

"Kaela, please keep your voice down."

"Why? Are you afraid the police will find you? Well, believe me, they will. I'll see to that."

My ears begin to buzz. I close my eyes and run through Kanamarra's exercises in my head. I have to control it. I must. This is no stranger. This is my Aunt Kaela. My father's sister.

The buzzing stops, and I can breathe again. I hear my father talking, and I open my eyes.

"What harm will it do, Kaela, if we simply leave?"

"Witches must burn." Her eyes glitter in the moonlight. "Let them go and they'll breed more like themselves, more witches. It has to be stopped at the source. She is a witch, and she has to burn. Get out of the way. I'm going to take her in. Then maybe they'll let you live."

My ears start to buzz again. I can hardly hear my father's words

"Don't you see, Kaela, that if you take Alie away, I'll have nothing left to live for?"

"She has to be taken. Stand aside."

"Kaela, you don't know the danger you're in."

I am reciting Kanamarra's exercises rapidly and with great concentration. I can feel the fire recede again.

I can do it. If I can just keep calm, make myself feel safe, then I can control the fire. I open my eyes and look at my Aunt Kaela.

Her stare pierces me like a knife through my heart. She gathers breath and opens her mouth to call for the police. I can feel the fire gathering. Then my father's hand presses my shoulder, and it is gone.

I look up at my father. It is difficult to see his face. I hear a crackle behind me, and I whirl around to see my aunt wrapped in a cocoon of black fire, clawing and trying to scream. But no sound emerges, and a moment later she begins to shrivel and crumble like sand into a smoking heap on the ground.

Then I feel my father's hand upon my shoulder again. I look up at him, unable to speak. He touches my head, gently.

"My life stands between you and harm, Alie. I promise you that. While I live, no one will harm you."

"You're a witch," I whisper, stupidly.

"And Kaela has hated me for that, all of my life."

"She knew?"

"Yes. She knew. She turned in your mother, after the riots, but she couldn't turn against her own blood. I thought you would be safe. I'm sorry. I should have taken you away years before. But there was always the chance you were normal. I wanted you to have the chance for a normal life. I'm sorry, Alie."

"Sorry! Sorry?" I laugh out loud and reach out to him with both arms. He folds me into a tight embrace. A breeze from the foothills sweeps down the street and stirs the ashes on the ground behind me.

"We must be well gone before sunrise, Alie."

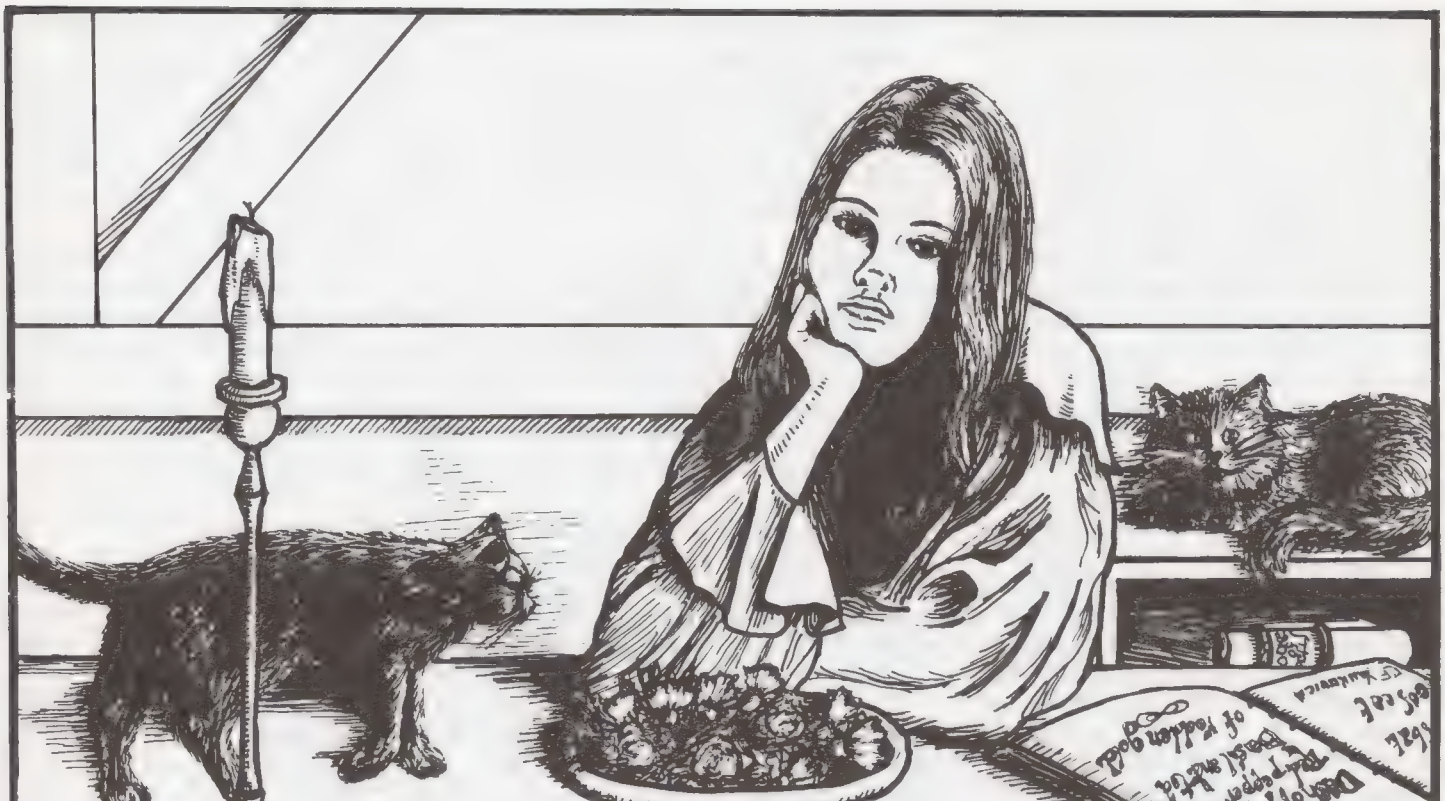
"Yes."

We turn together toward the mountains, and leave the city without a backward glance.

❄

Mary Ann Schenk tells us, "By the sixth grade, I had read all of Grimm and Anderson, as well as any Scandinavian, Russian, Chinese and Indian tales I could get my hands on." To her surprise, a course in meditation helped her writing skills, and she started working on her own stories. This is her first sale.

Cat Walker is a systems analyst from North Carolina where she lives with husband James (nicknamed "Cap", for "Cap'n") and six-year-old Amy. "I'm one of those people who will draw any time I have a pencil in hand," she says.



Artwork by C.F. Yankovich

Which She Was

by Jennifer Schwabach

Emma stared at the pile of straw, frowning. Sitting on the table in front of her, piled neatly on the plate, was most definitely a pile of straw. She looked at the book again. According to that, she should have a pile of *gold*, not straw. Her sister would definitely have gold. She got so tired of hearing it, "Phyllis can turn straw into gold... Phyllis can turn people into toads... Why can't *you* fly a broomstick nice and straight like Phyllis?" So Phyllis was in the advanced class, in school on Saturday. Well, she wasn't Phyllis, and the local coven could like it or lump it.

Sighing, she looked down at the spell again, reaching for the spice bottles.

"Dash of paprika, red pepper bold,
Basil and tea of rodden-gold,
Salt from where the sea is cold,
Make this straw here into gold!"

With a final flourish, Emma added the salt to the already well-spiced straw. She closed her eyes and counted to ten. With any luck, when she opened them, the straw would be gone.

It was. Lying on the plate where the straw had been a moment before was a pile of marigolds.

Marigolds!

Angrily, she swept them up and stalked across to the water pitcher, jamming them into it. She'd hear of it — using good drinking water for flowers — but she really didn't care. Phyllis probably had never gotten marigolds.

She'd have go over to the barn to get more straw. As she stomped toward the door, she threw a micro-bolt of lightening at one of the cats. It yowled and jumped away, hair standing on end.

She yanked the door open savagely ... and tripped on the door sill, tumbling tail over tea kettle down the steps. What sort of fool built steps without a rail, anyway? To make matters worse, Dunstan Miller was passing by, cart loaded with corn. He stopped his donkey and rushed over.

"Are you all right, Emma?"

She wasn't a child. She was two years older than Phyllis, and there was talk of letting Phyllis take full coven membership on her sixteenth birthday. Emma was almost old enough to marry, if she had any desire to, but she should be a witch, she should.

With as much dignity as she could manage, sitting on the ground, she said, "Yes, thank you, Master Dunstan." That shattered her brief spurt of adulthood, making her angrier. A child said "master". An adult would use "goodman".

"You sure? You just took a nasty tumble, child." He looked at her uncertainly.

Child! Her, in training to be a witch with Agatha, chief witch in all the county! She should turn him into a toad for that! She should ... Her mental tirade broke off in mid-"should".

Dunstan's face was turning a sickly greenish-brown. His eyes were staring so hard they seemed to be popping right out of his head. His legs were...

"No!" Emma cried, hands stretched out imploringly. "I didn't mean it! Turn back, turn back! Oh bother!"

Sitting on a pile of Dunstan's clothes was a medium-sized green and brown toad. Emma stared at it for a second while it flopped around in Dunstan's shirt.

"Um...wait there," she said. "I'll be right back." At least the cats were inside. She *thought* they were inside. Picking up her skirts, she ran back up the steps to sweep up the spell book and as many ingredients as she could carry in her skirt.

Dashing outside again, she dumped everything on the ground beside the clothes, where she was relieved to see the toad still exploring his world. Flipping through the book frantically, she said in a voice that she hope was steadier than it sounded to her, "Don't worry, we'll get you changed back in a jiffy. Just as soon as I find ... Ah, here it is." She tapped her finger on the page, unsure whether the miller was thinking like a miller or a toad. Reading over the spell once to familiarize herself with it, she began.

"Salt mixed in with Grasshopper's knee,
Fins of fish from far southern sea,
A toad's not what I want to see!"

There, that should do it. She looked up from the book. And didn't see Dunstan. For that matter, she didn't see a toad, either.

Not putting the book down, she used her free hand to feel gently around the miller's rough homespun. Her hand came into contact with a toad, hopping away. Now she did set the book aside to use both hands to scoop Dunstan up.

She studied her cupped hands. She could feel a toad, cool and sort of slimy-rough against her fingers and palms. But she couldn't see anything between her hands but air. It was time, she realized, to give up.

Standing as carefully as she could without daring to move her hands, she started to dash off to Agatha's school. She forced herself to slow to a walk. A tumble had started all this, running off without paying any attention to where her feet were landing. Another fall now could crush Dunstan.

Walking through the village with her hands held cupped ever so carefully before her earned her a few curious glances, but no one asked the questions they looked.

As a result, she was almost calm as she walked up the steps to Agatha's school. The students did poke their heads out of labs and storerooms to ask questions as she made her way down the hall to Agatha's office. She ignored them. They'd only laugh if they knew Emma had bungled another spell.

Agatha's office was dusty and poorly furnished, lit by a single grimy window. The dirt wasn't so much because Agatha didn't care as because she rarely had time.

Agatha was sitting behind the desk, peering at a paper before her through wire-rimmed glasses that made her narrow, lined face even more severe.

"What is it, child? Can't you come back later? I'm very busy here, Emma," she said. It was all delivered in one breath, without looking up.

"No, I can't. It's an emergency," Emma said.

Agatha adjusted her glasses, looking up at Emma. "A *real* emergency, or an eighteen-year-old emergency?"

"A real one."

"I'm waiting," Agatha said, in exactly the same tone she used when trying to find out who'd turned all the slates into chocolate. (Emma had *not* done that on purpose!)

"It's Dunstan Miller. I've turned him into a toad." She thrust out her hands.

Agatha took off her glasses and bent to stare between Emma's fingers. "There's nothing there, child." She straightened, reaching to settle her glasses on her nose again.

"Please, he's invisible!"

"Invisible,?" The glasses halted midway. "It this some kind of joke, Emma?"

"No," Emma said miserably. "I wish it was. You can feel him, though," She held out her hands again.

Agatha reached out a cautious finger, feeling around.

Artwork by C.F. Yankovich

"Well, I'll be blessed and hung out to dry," she said, "it *is* Dunstan! How did you do this?"

"Trying to turn him back," Emma said.

"Well, let's find a box to put him in." Agatha went into a corner, and began dumping books and papers out of a box, tossing them every which way.

While Emma stood there, holding Dunstan, Phyllis came in. "Emma, I thought I heard your ..."

"Freeze, girl!" Agatha said from the floor. We have an invisible toad in here. I don't want anyone stepping an him."

Phyllis stood there, month open with shock.

"Good," Agatha said. "Now, back out. Very carefully, mind, and shut the door behind you. It wouldn't do to have the victim escape."

Stunned, Phyllis obeyed.

"That sister of yours," Agatha said, standing and setting the box on the desk, "may be a snoot, but at least she's obedient."

Emma nodded, placing Dunstan carefully in the center of the box.

"Now, take your hands away, girl. I don't want you caught in the spell."

Emma hastily withdrew her hands, hoping Dunstan couldn't jump out of the box.

"Tell me exactly what happened," Agatha said.

Emma related the event as well as she could remember, even down to the marigolds.

"Hmm," was all Agatha said. She reached down and opened a drawer. Each gesture was sure and steady as she dusted various powders into the box.

"Eye of newt and tongue of grinch,
Add some pepper, just a pinch,
Toad to man: it's a cinch!"

She waved her hand over the box, and its sides bulged.

"Hey!" Dunstan's voice said. "I'm naked!"

Agatha gave Emma a little smile and pulled a blanket from another drawer. "Wrap yourself in this, dear. We can't see you anyway."

A hump of blanket appeared.

"Good. On to the next problem." Agatha reached back into the drawer. Emma couldn't help wondering if her teacher employed magic to fit that much into her desk.

Dusting her powders over the blanket, Agatha chanted:

"First a ground-up, dried green bean,
Then some hair from a magic teen,
Last some make-up worn by a queen,
Is needed to make the unseen seen!"

At first, nothing happened. Then, very slowly, Dunstan faded into visibility.

"It worked!" Emma clapped her hands.

"What worked?" Dunstan asked, scratching his head and trying, rather awkwardly, to climb out of the box and off the desk without losing his hold on the blanket.

"We turned you back. I mean, Agatha turned you back." Emma hastily explained what had happened, leaving Dunstan shaking his head in disbelief.

"Emma," Agatha said. "Why don't you go get Goodman Dunstan's clothes for him?"

This time, Emma ran all the way. When she returned, Dunstan was sitting on a rickety old chair, shaking his head and saying, "If you say so. I thought she couldn't do magic; that's what they say."

"Oh, she can, all right," Agatha smiled at Emma over his head.

Emma handed over the bundle, and the women stepped into the hallway to allow Dunstan to dress.

After he'd left, which he did quickly and without looking back, Agatha drew Emma back into her office. "Well, girl, what do you say?"

Sitting in the chair Dunstan had left — it was splintery as well as rickety — Emma said, "Well, he's right. I can't do magic, not properly, anyway."

"What is proper magic?" Agatha asked, folding her hands.

"Magic that works," Emma said.

"Did you not think of turning Dunstan into a toad just before he became one?"

"Yes, but when I tried to turn him *back*, look what happened!"

"I've suspected this about you for a long time, child," Agatha said,

"Suspected what?"

"A very few people are born with the natural ability so strong in them that attempting to follow spells and formulas only disrupts their concentration."

Emma just gaped at her. She couldn't speak. It sounded absurd, but at the same time, Agatha looked quite serious.

"I'm afraid I've done you some harm, keeping you here and trying to drill the traditional methods into you. As I said, such strong natural talent is rare. You'll have to learn from another such. I'll make arrangements with your parents, and send to Lisa Freeworth in County Estin to tell her you're coming."

"Leave home?" Emma said, torn between her desire to learn magic properly and the knowledge that she would miss her family, even Phyllis, after a while.

"It's not permanent. You'll be able to come back for holidays. When you finish your training, you'll be able to go anywhere you wish. A witch of the power you should be able to achieve would be welcome in any village, perhaps even the capital."

"But I only turned him into an invisible toad! I needed a *real* witch to turn him back!"

"You *are* a real witch, and once you learn how to use your power, that'll never happen to you again. You'll be able to do things Phyllis can only dream of."

Emma was still blinking in astonishment as Agatha hustled her out of the office, pleading the neglected paperwork. But by the time Emma started down the school steps, she was skipping like someone half her age. She was a witch, she was.

❄

Artwork by C.F. Yankovich

Jennifer Schwabach tells us, "After years of not very serious attempts to get published, I attended the Writer's Workshop in Science Fiction taught by James Gunn at the University of Kansas. That got me submitting. And resubmitting. And resubmitting. Aside from a small work-for-hire contract, this is my first professional sale."

C.F. Yankovich works as Information Resources Planner/Programmer for the State of AZ. She has exhibited widely in the Phoenix area and done illustrations for *Analog* and *Ad Astra*.

An Interview with Esther Friesner

by Elisabeth Waters

Nebula winner, Hugo nominee, hamster queen, and Jewish mother, Esther Friesner's humorous sf and fantasy novels have become minor classics in the current sf literary scene. She's also the editor of the recent anthologies **CHICKS IN CHAINMAIL** and **BLOOD MUSE**. This interview took place in Connecticut, May 1996.

EW: *Tell me something about your writing career? How did you get started?*

EF: I got started at the age of three, telling stories. My mother is an ex-English teacher, and she used to tell me stories all the time, and they were *literary* stories as opposed to just the fairy tales. I liked them so much I kept wanting more, and she finally told me, "make up your own, also learn to read, then you can have all you want." I would tell her the stories I made up, and she would write them down. Eventually I learned how to read and write, and then I took it from there. I wanted to be a writer from the get-go, but I also wanted to be an actress from the get-go; and I decided that I couldn't very well earn a living at either one of them, which just goes to show you how right I was.

As for actually selling writing — making a success of writing — that started back in graduate school. I was trying to break into every single genre there was. I even tried Harlequin Romances. The secret is: if you cannot read it, you probably cannot write it. I sent for the directions, I tried, and it just was not working. But I almost sold a mystery novel; they said "two out of three editors here loved this, but the third said no" — or else I would be writing mysteries right now. Even then the protagonist and the victim were both writers. I tried a historical, and that didn't sell either. So, the first thing that sold being science fiction, I figured God wanted me to write science fiction. The first thing came out in 1983 — a short story.

Did you study any writing related courses in school?

(Esther made a strange sound midway between a groan and a "yes".) I took two courses in college: Expository Writing and Creative Writing. The only thing I learned from those two courses was: write what the teachers *thinks* is literature. One teacher believed wholeheartedly that, if it's not D.H. Lawrence, it's nothing. And the other teacher was just fine as long as you wrote about sex or death. God help you if it had a real plot. If you could write about sex *and* death, that was just fine. I decided to write about what I knew, so I pulled a very bad grade up to a very good grade by writing a soul-searching exploration of a cemetery. It was poignant.

A precursor of "All Vows"?

I hope not. "All Vows" I wrote because I *wanted* to. This I wrote because my grade was bad. She liked it if you moped on paper. But I didn't learn anything useful — unless it was writing to a market. But I don't think too much of that. Sometimes someone will say they're doing an anthology about such-and-such and if the idea appeals to me, fine. I wrote a *Star Trek* book; that's writing to a market, but I love *Star Trek*. So there is a difference.

You went to Vassar and Yale; why do your characters attend (Tim Desmond) or teach at (Claudius) Princeton? What is it about Princeton?

Esther Friesner cozies up to her new Nebula in April, 1996 at the Queen Mary

Photo by Rachel Holmen

I thought that since I'd already taken care of Yale in **DEMON BLUES**, it was time to go pick on somebody else. I suppose I could have picked on Harvard, but I'll get around to them.

***Why** did you chose to write fantasy?*

It's fun. I got started reading science fiction and fantasy through fantasy. This is a strange and frightening story: I believed what they said — the 'they' being the received wisdom out there — girls aren't supposed to like science fiction (and, with it, fantasy), because, you know, then boys won't ask you on dates or something.

A fate worse than death.

Yes, exactly! I was a very severe believer in *Seventeen* Magazine, and they ran in their book review column a review of **THE HOBBIT**, and they said, "this is okay." Well, fine, I'll go give it a chance if *Seventeen* said it was a good book, and I read it and I loved it and then I went and read the trilogy, starting at book number two, because that was the one that was in the library,

and then three, and then one.

Then I had a friend who was a big science fiction fan (I went to an all girls' high school) and she convinced me that I could read Isaac Asimov and still get a date. And I read **THE CAVES OF STEEL** and **THE NAKED SUN**. All of this, of course, feeds right in to *Star Trek*, which I saw on TV. My first reaction was "Oh, God, look! Pointed ears!" I thought it was Legolas. I swear to God. And by the time I tried to quit — too late, I was hooked.

That was a very, very, very sad story, but also another reason I write fantasy is that was the first thing I wrote that sold. ...I sound horribly mercenary.

No. You sound like someone who wishes to continue eating.

Yes! Eating is good! That's why I didn't try to get a career as an actress. I like to eat. (Maybe too much, but who cares?)

Do you think it's easier to research than science fiction?

In a way, no. Well, wait a minute. It is easier ... it depends on the fantasy; there are so many kinds of fantasy. My latest book out now is **CHILD OF THE EAGLE** from Baen; that's an alternate history and a fantasy. I had to research the Rome of Brutus, the entire Roman Empire of the time, the Parthian Empire, warfare...

For a short story, "Up the Wall" — and it was just a funny light story — I had to research Beowulf's timeframe, when was Beowulf composed, when might Beowulf have lived, when might the historical Arthur have lived — I had to do a ton of research.

Something that's a High Fantasy, in your own world all your own creation, you're not researching, you're creating, but then the work is not in the research; the work is in creating a consistent believable world, all of whose aspects hold together. You cannot say "Well, they're going to worship cream cheese, because I say so. It's my world, darn it." Of course in our world we've got the platypus, which is the ultimate "because I said so" of the Divine.

Speaking of strange creatures, have you have any problems with your fans? Deranged fan mail, that sort of thing?

No. I've had fan mail that's been 'why did you do this?' and 'why did you do that?' but nobody has been deranged, thank you very much. I would like them to not start.

I had one woman come up to me at a convention and tell me that I got the leprechaun wrong in **GNOME MAN'S LAND**, and I said that it was my interpretation; it wasn't Lucky from Lucky Charms. So she said, No, the reason it was not right was she *knew* leprechauns. ...I don't think Martha Stewart has to deal with this.

And I did have somebody take me to task for unicorn physiology (in **ELF DEFENSE**) — and this woman said you can't hit a horse there without breaking its legs. It's true, you can't hit a horse there, but this is a unicorn. Unicorns can be many things: they can be horses with horns, or they're sometimes pictured part deer, but they're *not real*. I can hit them wherever I want and not do damage. But she insisted that because you can't hit a horse there my unicorn is wrong. Sometimes it doesn't even pay to argue.

But I've had some nice experiences with my fans. I think one of the neatest things about having fans is seeing what they do with what you've written — like costuming, or art. I saw somebody with a wonderful costume based on **MUSTAPHA AND HIS WISE DOG**. I just loved it.

Who influenced your work?

Walt Kelley (*Pogo*) — my father used to read it for bedtime stories — Rocky and Bullwinkle, *good* old Saturday morning live action television — I used to love that stuff. There were the swords, and there were the shields, fights that you could actually have some belief in — it was wonderful. It didn't have sermons. James Branch Cabell, Tolkien — that was the eye-opener, Asimov on the science fiction side, and Saki — the master of the steel dagger in the velvet glove. A basic classical education, especially the Spanish romantic authors — and my greatest inspiration as far as being productive, Lope de Vega. Everyone says if you produce a lot you can't possibly be good. He not only produced like crazy: thousands of plays, not even touching on the poetry, or the personal adventures in his life — he actually had a personal life, and produced, and was a commercial success, and an artistic success. So, yes, you can do it all. That's sort of a constant inspiration by example. I like him.

*You've edited several anthologies, including the notorious **CHICKS IN CHAINMAIL** and your most recent, **BLOOD MUSE**. What do you do as an editor?*

It depends on the set-up of the anthology. If it is an invitation-only anthology, some editors ask a number of people and buy whatever comes in, even if they have to get the person to rewrite it and rewrite it and rewrite it. I ask a number of people, realizing that not everyone can respond, and when the stories come in, if the story just isn't going to fit into that anthology, I tell the writer it just isn't what I had in mind, and if it's close, we talk rewrites. And I'm very happy to say that a lot of the time I don't have to bother anybody for rewrites, because either the writer was so in touch with the topic or my invitation, detailing what I wanted, was good enough to make the writer understand what I was after and come through on it.

If it's open, like **BLOOD MUSE** — and I like doing open anthologies because you can get great stuff over the transom from people you didn't know about, people who are aspiring writers. When it's open invitation, you read it all, and you find some things that are absolutely perfect on all levels. Sometimes, with something like **BLOOD MUSE**, which was about vampires in the arts, you'll wind up getting too many stories in one sub-category of the anthology, for instance, vampires and sculpture, and then you can say, "Okay, this is perfect, but I've got enough here already." Writing rejections is the hardest thing. I think a lot of editors use general rejection letters who would rather not, but they have to for a number of reasons. One reason is the sheer volume of submissions. I would love to be able to specify how the story could be improved if that's what kept it out, although sometimes what keeps a story out is that it simply isn't addressing the theme of the anthology. I couldn't take a story for **BLOOD MUSE** which wasn't in some way connected with vampires and art. You can stretch vampire and you can stretch the art idea, but if it's not there at all by *any* stretch, you can't take it. .... My train of thought seems to have gone to Westchester.... Oh, yes, about why we do a generic rejection. I think a number of editors have been burned by the unprofessional behavior of some people who have submitted. I heard of one case where the response to a rejection letter telling how the story could be improved was a long, vituperative letter, full of abusive language, saying how the editor didn't know anything and on and on and on — I don't think the phrase "my mother thought this was good" was actually in there, but you'll see it...

I have seen it. Marion gets these fairly often.

"My creative writing teacher said this was good" — that

Photo by Rachel Holmen

sort of thing. I have often thought that if you want someone who is already overworked and dealing with piles of manuscripts to be more receptive to your particular manuscripts, you *don't* do it by behaving in this manner. So that is why a lot of editors use the "We're sorry, this does not suit our present needs" version.

Always behave in a professional manner, and always remember that the editor is not rejecting *you*. If you can't divorce yourself from your work, you had better learn how to. A story can mean an awful lot to a writer, and some of my stories mean a very great deal to me. I am extremely proud of them — I'm happy with everything I write, or I wouldn't send it out. If I'm not happy with it, it doesn't go out; you don't send your child out the door naked. But you really have a bond with some of the stories you do, and if it gets rejected, you feel disappointed. But that's not you, no matter how strong the bond is between you and the story, that story is not your life. I realize that sometimes such stories are based on your life, but that's still not your life. You don't live through your children, whether they're your physical children or the children of your words.

What about your writing routine. Do you have any special rituals, like sharpening all your pencils?

No. When I can, I write. At the moment I have computers in three locations in the house. So I guess the ritual is deciding what I feel like writing on, because we're phasing out one computer. So I go upstairs to write or go downstairs to write or stay on the ground floor to go on GEnie.

But I haven't got any kind of rituals — you know, you make sure the children aren't on fire and you make sure the cats haven't stolen the car, and if everything else is under control, then, go for it... Come to think of it, I can write under almost any circumstances ... almost.

Do you have anyone who reads and criticizes your work in progress?

They wouldn't dare. What I will do, after I've been working on a novel for a while, is come to dinner and say, "Oh, I did this, that, and the other thing today," and people will say "Oh, yes," and they'll take an interest in it.

But I don't let anybody see it until I send it out the door. I always figure that the editor is going to be seeing it and commenting on it; let the editor tell me what could stand changing. For all I know, if I listen to everybody else in the house and then send it out, the editor may ask me to change it back to the way I had it originally. I believe in less work for mother.

I used to belong to a writers group, but it broke up because everybody moved away. And it was a *very* good group... The reason it was so good was you had to have already sold something to get into it, because that was proof of your sincerity, of wanting to become a better writer, of professional intention. I heard stories from some of the other members of belonging to writers groups where everyone wanted to be a writer, but didn't see why they should have to write to do it.

Do you work from an outline?

Sometimes. Lately I do, but one important thing to bear in mind is that I am not married to the outline. Sometimes I'll rewrite the outline several times in the course of writing the book, simply because a character I hadn't thought of as vital when I was thinking of the book suddenly is very interesting. And you want to spend your time with the interesting people.

And sometimes I realize that my romantic desires have turned the book into an impossibility. For instance, in **THE WATER KING'S LAUGHTER**, I had a very sympathetic character: kind to his brother, who was mentally retarded; saved the life of a woman who was going to die otherwise ... and then in the big battle at the end he got shot full of arrows. My romantic notion was to have every single one of the arrows miss a vital spot, so that he could marry the woman whose life he'd saved and life happily ever after 'cause he was good and good people should get all of that. And then I realized that you can't be shot full of arrows and survive unless you're Saint Sebastian. So I had to put aside what *I* wanted, and kill him. The good of the story above all.

In a trilogy, how much effort do you put into making sure that you don't contradict an earlier book? I know some authors don't worry about it much, and others make careful notes and follow them.

Usually when I'm writing a trilogy I have got the three outlines or plans ready at once. If I'm doing one after another with no projects in between I haven't really got a problem because it's pretty fresh in my mind. Otherwise, well, that's why God created editors and copy editors, who'll pay more attention to it and go "You know, you've got this character

who was sort of *dead* at the end of chapter five, and now he's in book two, chapter eight, *alive* — could we do something about this?"

Do you do any writing while you're traveling?

In longhand only, in notebooks. When I'm traveling it's either business or pleasure. When it's pleasure, I really try to keep it as pleasure. I used to want to turn everything in my life into a story idea. This goes hand-in-hand with my idea that all writers are basically vampires — to us you are food. I decided I am going to be a better writer if I can just relax and do something for myself. It goes back to being able to separate who you are from what you write. I am taking a vacation, because if my whole life, including my off time, becomes writing, then when people reject my writing, they'll be rejecting me. That's not healthy for my writing or for me. But sometimes you come across an idea that's just too good and you don't want to forget it, so you start in on it.

Do you have a lot of animals in your home? Your love for hamsters is almost legendary.

Currently we have two psychotic cats and a wonderful hamster named Lady Morgana Cheeblesdottir de Willoughby. Never ask both the kids what to name the hamster — you have to take all the names they came up with and put them together.

The cats are Nero and O.J., whose last name has now become "No, we didn't name him after that." We should have just let Michael name him Caligula, as he wanted to. I still remember saying, "No, Michael, you named one of them Nero; Annie gets to name the other; and I am not having *two* cats named after murderers."

What projects are you working on now?

Right now I am working on a *Star Trek: The Next Generation* book, which is called **TO STORM HEAVEN**. It's going to deal with one of my pet peeves, which is what I call spiritual vampires. This is purely figurative — it's the people who see another ethnic group or ritual path and adopt the *trappings*. There's nothing wrong with finding your spiritual center in something other than the way you were brought up, but it has to be sincere, it isn't just "Oh, look at me, I bought this little fetish, now am I not spiritual?"

The other project is a novel called **PLAYING WITH FIRE**, based on the White Wolf role playing game *Changeling*. I'm having a wonderful time because I've got a hero in it who is Eurasian, and I've mostly done Caucasian protagonists, and I'd like to do something *different* for Heaven's sake! Also, in keeping with doing something different, in *Changeling*, they practice different arts, and I wanted to do something very different — I don't like the way the vampire is always a rock-and-roll star and the elves are always doing rock-and-roll, so Tony's art is fireworks, which really is a wonderful art to play with.

And I'm also working on a story for *F&SF*; they gave three of us a cover painting and said "Go for it; become inspired." I'm doing a science fiction story, Nina Kiriki Hoffman is doing a horror story, and Mike Resnick is doing a fantasy story.

And then I'm writing some stories that are just for me. I got a fan letter that inspired a story. I have to deal with too much inspiration; I get inspiration from typos. And I definitely want to do more anthologies.

What advice would you give to aspiring writers?

Get a professional attitude first thing out of the box. If you have a professional attitude, you will be a great comfort and relief to the hundreds of long-suffering, overworked editors out there. Learn the craft as well as the art of writing.

Don't worry about getting ideas. Ideas are all around you. Worry about how to convey those ideas to the reader, so that the reader will understand. You are in the business of communicating. Communicating doesn't work if you're the only one who understands what you're writing.

Realize that the story isn't *you*. Make it as good as you can, then send it out there. If someone says change this about it, decide whether you want to. If you don't want to, then send it to somebody else. But if everyone to whom you send it says to change the same thing, you had better sit back and take another look at it. Your words are not written in stone because it's very hard to get granite into a PC.

But if you, even after everybody has said "change this; do it that way," still feel that strongly about it, then you have to go back to being true to your own vision. Maybe you have to wait for the next generation of editors.

This is a very strange business; it is highly intuitive and yet at the same time it is highly practical. And it *is* a business; if you can't deal with the realities of the business world, then write for yourself the way Emily Dickinson did.

This is a business, and it has to show a profit, more so now than ever before. I guess I'm practical as opposed to being horribly, horribly mercenary, but I am practical.

And *don't* try to second guess the market. If you see a million books out there with robo-unicorns in them and you think robo-unicorn books sell, and you write a robo-unicorn book not because you want to but because you are trying to cash in on the robo-unicorn market, by the time you get that book out there the robo-unicorn market may be either glutted or done.

In addition to your fiction writing and your editing, I understand you are also active in education. Your lessons on the meaning of Chanukah in your topic on GEnie last December were fascinating.

That's going back to telling stories again. I like to learn things myself; I like to learn a lot of different things. It's a multi-faceted world and you never know what's going to fascinate you. For instance, I found a book, **BULLWHIP DAYS**, a WPA project book with firsthand testimony of people who had been slaves. I just picked it up — it was nothing that touched my upbringing personally; we were slaves a couple of *thousand* years ago (of course, now I'm a fashion slave), but you never do know what other people will be interested in hearing about. Something you think you're going to bore them with, they may want to know about.

I also talk at schools, in the more conventionally understood sense of educational. That a problem, that many people think education is only what you get in school, or just in the classroom.

*Speaking of school, I loved your title for Tim Desmond's Spanish book: **APRENDEMOS ESPANOL AHORA MISMO**.*

One of the most fun things is getting to make up book titles in stories — romance titles especially. I've got a romance writer in a story I'm working on now, who writes historical romances with titles such as **DRUID'S DESIRE** and **MILLARD FILLMORE, MY BELOVED**. That's fun, and country western song titles are fun too. Of course, country western song lyrics are fun also.

I've also seen your etiquette column "Ask Auntie Esther." How did you get started doing that?

I think I just suggested this to Dean Wesley Smith of *Pulphouse*, and next thing I knew I was a columnist... I suppose I had also read far too much Miss Manners. I used to read **VOGUE'S BOOK OF ETIQUETTE** when I was a child.

There are a ton of columns left.

*How did you come to write **THE PSALMS OF HEROD** and **THE SWORD OF MARY**?*

I have two cats, one hamster, and about half-a-dozen or more pet peeves, and one of them is: I don't like the idea of writers being pigeonholed. We tend to get pigeonholed into a marketing slot. I didn't want to be "Esther Friesner, Funny Fantasy Author". I write sf, I write horror, I have done whatever I feel like. I feel the only limit should be: can you write it well?

PSALMS and **SWORD** are definitely major departures for me. Early in my career I established a reputation as an author of funny fantasy, but I do not believe that authors should be limited by their reputations. **PSALMS** and **SWORD** are anything but funny, and — scary as it sounds — though they're marketed as dark fantasy, the societal practices in Becca's world (Becca being the heroine of the books) all have their roots in our history. We've done these things — we meaning human beings. If we don't watch out, we could do them again.

PSALMS OF HEROD started as a short story, inspired by a single panel in **THE CARTOON HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE**, by Larry Gonick. I can't recommend **THE CARTOON HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE** enough. There are now two volumes out. Buy both. Buy them several times. **THE CARTOON HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE** *is* a funny book, though there's little that's comical about **PSALMS** and **SWORD**. The same thing happened to me when I wrote "Death and the Librarian": it was a serious work inspired by something funny, namely two figurines from the RPG based on Terry Pratchett's hilarious DISCWORLD series. Inspiration ... go figure.

In any case, as I was planning out the original **PSALMS** story I discovered that the society and backstory I was extrapolating demanded a larger canvas than a short story could afford it. "Okay," I reasoned as I kept on figuring out Becca's world. "So it's a novelette." It wasn't. Nor was it a novella, nor — as I ultimately discovered — a single novel. In fact, even though **SWORD** gives the story closure, there is still plenty of room for more books to be written about this world, and I would love to have the chance to write them!

PSALMS and **SWORD** are extremely *strong* books. After these, I don't think I'll ever again be characterized solely as "Oh, she's that funny fantasy writer." I'm pleased to report that **PSALMS** is generating a lot of very favorable reactions from both critics and the reader-in-the-street and I hope **SWORD** will do the same. It wasn't easy writing some of the scenes in these books, but Becca's world is a harsh one and I couldn't sanitize the horror or I'd be betraying the story.

The underlying theme of both books is that human beings often rationalize our worst deeds with the highest-sounding reasons we can find. Religion was meant to offer us comfort and make life's sorrows easier to bear. Most faiths have some version of the Golden Rule as part of their system of belief. Unfortunately, religion is often one of the first excuses seized upon by certain people to excuse and even encourage acts of violence against others. Sorry, but the Golden Rule does *not* say: "Do unto Others as You would have Them do unto You ... unless They are Different than You, in which case do unto Them whatever You can get away with."

Strange to say, dark as these books are, they are optimistic and, I hope, uplifting. If we can rescue our true humanity from a society like the ones that exists in **PSALMS** and **SWORD**, there is plentiful hope for us. I like to believe that's the case.

One the other hand, a theme of **THE SWORD OF MARY** is that there is no such thing as a helpless woman. None of the boys will want to play with me after this.

Any final words of wisdom?

I've always hated that question. My parents used to introduce me with, "This is our daughter; she's very bright. Say something smart." Once I was so fed up with it that I said "Meow." And who is to say that "meow" isn't the true meaning of the universe?

❄

An Esther M. Friesner Bibliography

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"All VOWS" (*Asimov's SF Magazine*; November 1992)
"Three Queens" (*Asimov's SF Magazine*; January 1993)
"Sugar Daddy" (*Fantasy & Science Fiction*; January 1993)
"One Quiet Day in the Suburbs" (*Fantasy & Science Fiction*; May 1993)
"Lowlifes" (*Asimov's SF Magazine*; May 1993)
"'White!' Said Fred" (*Asimov's SF Magazine*; October 1993)
"Two Lovers, Two Gods, and a Fable" (*Fantasy & Science Fiction*; March 1994)
"Jesus at the Bat" (*Fantasy & Science Fiction*; July 1994)
"A Beltaine and Suspenders" (*Fantasy & Science Fiction*, October 1994)
"Death and the Librarian" (*Asimov's SF Magazine*; December 1994)
"Down by the Old Mainstream" (*Pulphouse* #19; July 1995)
"A Birthday" (*Fantasy & Science Fiction*; August 1995)
"And Thereby Hangs..." (*Pirate Writings*; No.9, 1996)
"Prey" (*Asimov's SF Magazine*; forthcoming)
"In the Realm of Dragons" (*Asimov's SF Magazine*; forthcoming)
"Chestnut Street" (*Fantasy & Science Fiction*; forthcoming)
"Miss Thing" (*Fantasy & Science Fiction*; forthcoming)
"Ecce Hominid" (*Pulphouse Press*; 1991; #6 in a series of paperback short stories)

Poetry

"The Shield-Maiden's Honeymoon" (*Fantasy Book*; Sept. 1984)
"Chivalry" (*Fantasy Book*; Sept.1985)
"The Vampire of Gretna Green" (*Fantasy Book*; Dec. 1985)
"The Sincere Symbiote" (*Amazing Stories*; Sept.1986)
"A New Chantey" (*Amazing Stories*; May 1988)
"Spell for a Nuclear Witch" (*Amazing Stories*; July 1988)
"Who Made the Stew on Betelgeuse II?" (*Aboriginal SF*; Sept.-Oct.1988)
"Cat-Tech-Ism" (*Amazing Stories*; Nov.1988)
"Food for Thought" (*Amazing Stories*; July 1989)
"Confessio" (*Amazing Stories*; Sept. 1989)
"The Hobbyist" (*Amazing Stories*; Nov.1989)
"Lovers" (**SOUTH FROM MIDNIGHT**; (October 1994 for World Fantasy Convention)

Articles

(on do-it-yourself horror writing) *Twilight Zone*
"Flower of England, Fruit of Spain" (**THE ONCE AND FUTURE ARTHUR**; Niekas Publications 1989)
"Who Was That Alien I Saw You With Last Night?" (*Amazing Stories*, July 1990)
"One of the Good Guys" (GALLERY feature/David Mattingly appreciation essay in *Science Fiction Age*; July 1995)
"It only Sbjrks When I Laugh" (*Science Fiction Age*; November 1995)
"Take My Wizard...Please!" (Writer's Digest Books; forthcoming)

Editing

ALIEN PREGNANT BY ELVIS (with Martin H. Greenberg; DAW; June 1994)
CHICKS IN CHAINMAIL (with Martin H. Greenberg; Baen Books; September 1995)
BLOOD MUSE (with Martin H. Greenberg; Donald I. Fine; December 1995)

Miscellaneous

"Cats" (article on Annie, the Blackstone Memorial Library cat)
"Brides" (article on how to survive advice during the first year of marriage)
The Shame of Maudie Jones (old fashioned "mellerdrama" play produced at the Iron springs Chateau in Manitou Springs, Colorado dinner theatre)
"Ask Auntie Esther"; advice column in *Pulphouse*, beginning issue #6, October 25, 1991; #7, November 29, 1991; #8, December 31, 1991; #10, July 1992; #12/13, September/October 1992; #15 (no issue date); #17 (no issue date)

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The Results of the Cauldron

Stories:

- 1st Place: **"Eighty Shen" by Carrie Martin**
- 2nd Place: **"Fox Maid's Travail" by Jo Clayton**
- 3rd Place: **"The Little Pink Worm" by Dorothy J. Heydt**

Artwork:

- 1st Place: **Lori Deitrick for "All Blessings"**
- 2nd Place: **Michael Kucharski for "Eighty Shen"**
- 3rd Place: **Nicholas Jainschigg for "Fox Maid's Travail"**

Congratulations to all the winners! To vote for your favorites in *this* issue, use the ballot on page 64.

Writers talk back:

How to Annoy an Editor

by Raul S. Reyes

Contrary to popular opinion, editors are human, and do have their share of human foibles, quirks, and oddities. A knowledge of these can be helpful in making a sale.

Before you start on your career as a writer, be aware that there are many other would-be royalty-collectors competing with you, quite a few of them just as good as you. So how do you make those sales and start on a life of fame, fortune, and talk show appearances? Hearken and you shall learn.

It helps to see the matter from the viewpoint of an editor. Unsolicited manuscripts come into the office in a deluge. (The places where manuscripts do not come in a deluge usually don't pay that well, so you really don't want to submit to them, do you?) An under-paid, over-worked staff of elves, fairies, and gremlins (with an occasional human thrown in for flavoring) then opens the mail, puts paper clips on the manuscripts that don't already have paper clips on them, and attaches the self-addressed, stamped envelope that should accompany them. In some offices matters are a bit more organized, and the story may actually be logged into a database and a manuscript control sheet printed out to be attached to the manuscript. The daily pile is then taken in to be read.

That daily pile is just that. Stacks over a foot high are common, and in the larger periodicals the manuscripts literally are stacked to the ceiling. Most of them are not worth reading. (They don't call it the slush pile for nothing. I've heard other names for it.) Most editors do not read it all. (MZB is an exception, she reads it ALL. That is one of the myriad reasons fandom lives in fear and awe of her.) So at most places there is a first reader, or two, or three... These are usually local college students hired part-time at minimum wage whose job is to read the first page (and **only** the first page), and find reasons to reject the manuscript.

What reasons are there? Manuscript preparation is the first criterion. It is a reasonable assumption that if you don't know the ABCs of manuscript preparation, you are not professional enough to write a good story. You may be a good writer, but if two equally good stories come in, and one is well-prepared and easy to read, and the other isn't, the editor will read (and, you hope, buy) the story that gives less eye-strain.

The manuscript should be typed, or printed, in black ink on white paper. The printing should be letter quality. It should be single-sided, left (but **not** right) justified, double spaced, and printed on standard 8-1/2" by 11" opaque paper. No colored paper, parchment, or corrasable bond. It should not be bound or stapled in any way. A paper clip should be all that is holding it together. Your last name and the page number should be on each page. Piles of manuscripts often topple over onto the floor, and it helps if they can be easily sorted out.

...single-sided, left (but **not** right) justified, double-spaced, and printed on standard 8-1/2" by 11" opaque paper. No colored paper, parchment, or corrasable bond.

A word about cover letters. **Don't**. The story should speak for itself; it is not necessary for you to tell the story in the cover letter. It's just another piece of paper for the first reader, or the editor, to fight through. If your story is bought you may be asked for a short bio. **Then** you can talk about your cats, travels, significant others, interests, hobbies, past felonies, whatever.

The title page is what everyone sees first. At the upper left hand corner you should write your true name and mailing address. The word count, to the nearest 100 words, goes in the opposite corner. Half-way down the page is the title, with your name (or pen name) just under it. A double space down you can start your story.

Indent the start of each paragraph. Margins should be large enough for editorial comments. One and 1/2 inches on top and left, one inch on bottom and right, are standard. Use a plain typeface that is large enough to read easily. The standard is twelve point Courier. Fancy fonts look fussy and pretentious. Don't think the editor, or anyone else, will be impressed by your new desktop publishing program.

There is usually room for about ten to fifteen lines on the first page. In those lines, for a short story, you should establish what kind of story it is (western, mystery, fantasy, science-fiction, or whatever), introduce the main character, and start the action. Editors want stories that will hook the

casual browser at the magazine stand, and the first few lines are where you set the hook. The first working writer I ever met (one who actually got paid) was a pornographer. I'll never forget his words of advice: "By the end of the first page she should have her blouse off." Please be advised that that advice does **not** hold for MZB'S *FANTASY Magazine*.

The first page is also where you do not want to make any mistakes in spelling, grammar, or punctuation. You should pay careful attention to those basics all through the manuscript, of course, but making such errors on the first page is fatal. Spelling, grammar, and punctuation are the basic tools of a writer, and errors show a lack of professionalism. Given a choice, editors and publishers prefer to deal with other professionals.

A few words about titles. Try for some originality (but not too much) when you choose a title for your story. Fantasy editors get too many titles like The Crystal Sword, the Crown of Crystal, the Gift of the Magician, Quest for The Crystal Gryphon, etc. The title is your first chance to impress the editor with your creativity. Try to avoid titles that contain the words Sword, Crystals, Quest, Dragon, Unicorn, etc. Also, use a title that human vocal cords can pronounce.

Do try to write the type of story the magazine will buy. A mystery story should go to a mystery magazine, a western to a western magazine, a science-fiction story to *Analog* or *F&SF*, etc. While there are exceptions, keep in mind they **are** exceptions, and when you start out it's best to play the percentages. Read the guidelines and at least a few issues of the market you are submitting to before sending in your manuscript.

Editors get peeved if they run across indications that the writer doesn't know the language. For example, know the difference between *its* and *it's*. It's is short for it is, and its refers to the possesive. E.g.: It's a fast ship; its hull is hydrodynamically sound.

Or *lay* and *lie*. Lay implies action upon an object, as in "I lay me down to sleep," or "I lay this paperweight upon the desk." Lie implies action, to be in or remain at rest in a horizontal position, as in "I lie in wait for my enemy."

Know the difference between less and fewer. If you can count something, it is fewer. E.g.: "There are fewer than four boats left ashore." Less is an indeterminate term. E.g.: "He has less charisma than a potato."

Like and *as* are also often confused. As refers to something being to the same degree or amount. E.g.: "As deaf as a post." "As long as a summer day." Like implies something is the same or nearly the same as in quality or amount. E.g.: "His room is like a barn." "A rose is like a summer day."

These distinctions may seem trivial and subtle, but good usage is the mark of a professional writer. It helps to have a dictionary and grammar handbook handy. Most working writers have a reference shelf close at hand to their writing desks, or workstation.

Dialect is like spice; it should be used sparingly. A touch can help delineate character, time, and locale. Too much can become difficult to follow, and can detract from the story. Remember, good prose is transparent, it is a tool for telling the story, not an *objet d'art* that is to admired for itself.

Character names can be tricky. In both fantasy and science fiction there is a tendency to try for exotic nomenclature. That should be done carefully. To start with, names should be pronounceable. Just because you can pronounce them does not mean the editor, or the reader, can. This is not the place to showcase your familiarity with a foreign language. Remember, most people read fiction for escape, to relax after a hard day's work. If they have to fight through a forest of unpronounceable verbiage, they won't be too interested in your prose. Most writers invest in a baby name book. Most maternity shops have them.

> Be aware that there are many other would-be royalty-collectors competing with you

The name should not be a real word. This can be distracting at best. A few years ago there was a vogue in the SCA and fandom for a name from a very popular fantasy series. Unfortunately that name, in real life, was also the name for a very spicy fish stew. It caused no small amount of comment. People can have names that also refer to something else. For example, the New England custom of naming girls after the virtues. If you give a character a name that is a word, there should be a reason for it, and you should make it clear.

Be careful with foreign names. To start with, get the gender straight. A few years ago I saw a fantasy story with a Japanese setting. All the samurai (male) had names that ended with -ko. The author seemed unaware that -ko is a diminutive suffix used in feminine names. The entire manuscript had to be redone with appropriate names.

Be aware that names can have connotations in their original language. Would you take seriously an action-adventure story whose hero was named Hubert of the Yukon? Unless you are familiar with the language and culture, be very careful about borrowing names from foreign sources. In the original (Old English) version of Hamlet, Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, is named Fang. Shakespeare did well to change that.

This just a start. To really know how to write, you should read. Read widely, not just in the field you want to write in, but all others as well, and also in many non-fiction fields. Not only will reading expand your horizons, but you will acquire, by a form of osmosis, knowledge of the language, and of the skill of writing. Both will add to your craft. Many happy sales.

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http://www.well.com/user/mzbfm/

...and don't you forget it!

Artwork by Michael Kucharski

United Powers

by Kathleen M. Massie-Ferch

Goddess Nuut filled the night sky with her starry beauty, paled only by the silver splendor of a full moon. I watched the stars reflect in the still surface of the slowly rising floodwaters, disturbed only by our small skiff gliding through the ever-expanding Nile. The water smelled of rich muds and life. The night was as still as death, but for the silent figure at my side. Narmer, newly crowned Pharaoh of Upper Egypt, watched the stars even as I did, his body rigid with tension.

Why had he forced me to come with him? He didn't want me here, I could see it as the starlight glinted off his dark eyes. He didn't trust me and wanted to be alone.

The water was almost too shallow for our little boat and its three-person load. With a wave of Narmer's hand, General Neheb back-paddled and the boat slowed, then stopped. Narmer hopped out of the skiff into water that only reached mid-calf. The mud sucked at his bare feet, slowing his movements. He waded to my side of the boat and held out his hand to me. I clutched the boat seat even harder. Trust him? He had brought war to my land!

The light of Ma-at was in his eyes, as it had been in his mother's all those years ago. I had been so young when she came to visit my father's court. Where they both goddess-touched? I couldn't stop the shiver that went through me. Did he see my fear?

He reached over and lifted me from the skiff, breaking my hold on the boat as if I had neither weight nor strength! A wooden splinter pierced my hand. The sharp pain ended my feeble struggle even as his large hands held me too tightly. Never would he hear a complaint from my lips, I-who-was-Pharaoh's-Daughter. He walked inland, away from the main course of the great Nile, carrying me as if I were a mere parcel and not his reluctant bride.

The land was still, filled only with the sounds of our passage: splashing, the soft rattle of my necklace beads, and the creak of his leather knife sheath. Narmer set me down in the shallow, cool water. Not a sound escaped my lips, nor would it, even if he had dropped me. A bat winged overhead in pursuit of its dinner.

"Your temper —" his words were soft, even and without any emotion, "— against that I can fight and perhaps even win, but your silence! How do I fight that stubborn silence? You've said nothing since our wedding ceremony. I suppose this is your way of accepting a marriage you don't want. Do you expect me just to go away, or will you seek revenge during some still night, as General Neheb has warned me?"

I smiled. Satisfaction passed through me even as I saw the pain in his eyes. Let him guess!

In his finest white linen, Pharaoh Narmer then knelt in the still floodwaters, here less than ankle-deep. I could feel the tension in his large frame, even though we did not touch. The rich black silt cradled him where he knelt. He had left the White Crown of Upper Egypt in his palace, though he hadn't removed the ceremonial beard, his own beard too sparse and short to give the prestige his appearance needed during the crowning ceremony. Why wasn't he in his stolen palace, celebrating his latest victories? Instead he waited in flooded fields, with bone knife in hand.

Artwork by Michael Kucharski

"Kneel beside me, Merneith."

I remained standing. He reached up and yanked me down beside him. A soft grunt of surprise escaped as I splashed to my knees in the sweet water. I cursed my weakness.

"Goddess Nuut, bear witness to my prayers," Narmer began. He bent over the water-soaked mud and hesitated. "I am your soldier as well as your priest. My bloody victories have given me my father's White Crown. At the gods' bidding, I have killed many rivals in battle."

Including the man I had tried to make pharaoh by marrying. A man who would have been a good ruler for Upper Egypt. I wanted to shout the words at him; instead, I took comfort in knowing that rivals still lived who might yet avenge my honor and free me and my land.

The water, muddied by our passage, had cleared some. Moonlight flashed off his bone blade as he set its bright point in the fertile black silt. There he carved an outline of a shield. It was as if both the mud and knife glowed. I could see his actions clearly in the silver-white light of stars and moon.

"Goddess Hator, protectress of us all." On each side of the shield's top he carved the horned cow head of Hator. In the shield's center he carved what appeared to be himself, the victor over his southern enemies, my people. "I am Pharaoh of Upper Egypt by your graces. I am Horus, son of god Osiris, for only falcon-headed Horus could defeat the god Seth and those who would steal my throne and invade my land."

"You are a thief and murderer, just as Horus is." My harsh whisper broke his prayer. "You are the invader bringing death and heathen gods to fight your war."

"I am Pharaoh Tehuti-mer's eldest son. The White Crown is mine by birth. You are pharaoh's daughter and my wife by the law's decree. If you hadn't tried to deny me my throne, there'd have been fewer deaths."

"You are the son of a northern she-demon. You gave away birth rights when you defied Father and stayed in the northern Temples and embraced the gods of Lower Egypt." The soft jangle of my jewelry filled the void between us as I clenched muck in my

hands, wanting to throw it at him. Outraged, I watched him force an emerging smile away. He would laugh at me again as he had during our first fleeting meeting! Practically at our father's deathbed!

"How dare you ridicule me!" I said. "You can never love this land as I do. Or serve as I serve it."

"True, I grew up in the Northern Temples. I am their priest, but I also believe the Southern way. There is room in my heart for loving all gods, and both lands. I pray you understand someday. I love the Two Lands more than you can know."

I stopped myself from answering and stared at him. Doubt crowded me. Of whom? Me or him? I tensed to move away.

Narmer grabbed my wrist. "Stay!" he ordered. The tension did not leave me. "Please stay," he asked, more softly, as soft as a lover's whisper.

I pulled my arm from his grasp, but did not get up. I felt his relief, and realized with surprise he really wanted me here.

Narmer turned back to his spell. "My victory is done well by the grace of all gods. But victory, if only in war, is an empty victory, as tenuous as the wind. My people need more than that, beloved Ma-at. When the floods recede, the fields will be planted by soldier and farmer alike. I will feed all my people. No one will want for anything. This I promise my gods."

A soft sound of disgust escaped before I could stop it. He ignored me and took several handfuls of silt and spread them over his glyphs, completely covering them. Again he carved two images of Goddess Hator on the top of the newly outlined shield; she would protect this symbol of his.

The mud beneath me quivered. I could feel the gods' and goddesses' presence in the water caressing my skin. They were close, all around, listening, whispering in the wind. What did they say? Would they abandon this upstart now, when he was so close to ruling both lands? I prayed they would, but what god had listened to my prayers since this war began, or even since my father died?

"Do the powerful Delta gods fight those of Upper Egypt as my priests warn, even as your Delta men fight against us?" I tried to keep my voice low and steady as I spoke to the wind, but even I could hear my fear.

He glanced at me before whispering to the sky. "The gods' battle is long finished, even if ours is not. Osiris has made his peace with Seth. Isis with Nephthys." He continued on with his spell-prayer. "I am Pharaoh Narmer. I will do what no one has ever done, I will unite Lower and Upper Egypt, Tamahai and Sha-mei." He whispered the sacred names.

Even though we didn't touch, I could now feel his fear of failure. The waters carried it to me. His eyes were wide, his body suddenly very still. I felt the power of the gods that surrounded us and filled the water as a storm fills the air. As he formed it, the magic of his spell bled into the water.

Narmer next carved his image wearing the distinctively shaped Red Crown of the Nile delta, celebrating his future victories over his mother's people, enemies who had yet to fall. He carved many headless soldiers, to speed his victory, and perhaps lessen the real deaths. "The battles will be fierce, Merneith. The great fortress city of Buto will fall to me, Pharaoh Narmer, for I am the Bull of the Nile."

"You are mad, Narmer!" I whispered, afraid to disturb the magic, the power. "Do you think yourself a god?"

"You had never spoken my name before. I like the sound of it on your lips."

I began to move away from him.

"Do not be angry with me for wanting you to be my wife. There is no choice, and, no, I am not yet a god."

"It is a fool's dream. Do you think that just by invoking the Northern gods and our Southern gods that your dreams will become reality?"

"You said 'our gods'." He smiled. "It is the gods' dream as well. If the Two Lands do not unite, we wouldn't be strong enough to defeat the invaders from the east."

"What?" Fear sank deeper into my bones as I remembered a half-spoken comment of my father's. He refused to repeat his words for fear of worrying me, he said. "What do you mean? What invaders?"

Narmer spoke slowly, as if remembering a dream. "The Mesopotamians won't come too soon, perhaps not even in my life, but they will come. Not as the traders of the past, but as invaders. This is why my mother sought out our father, and why I was born. She was a priestess of Ma-at and saw the future. My life has never been my own. But even I must fight for my victories."

I shook my head in disbelief. "More Northern magic. You abandoned our gods for hers."

"Never. All gods are my gods. I am their child. I am son of the gods Osiris and Horus and even Seth just as you are the daughter of the goddesses Nephthys and Isis, Ma-at and Neith."

"Never of Isis!" I cried. "Osiris and Horus, they are all Delta gods. I'll never worship them. Seth is my lord. Nephthys, my Lady. The priest of Pe will never accept you."

"Osiris is Seth's brother, Isis is their sister. They rule over the length of the Nile, the entire length, together. The Delta gods are our gods, too." Narmer resumed his spell prayer. "Our people will harness the animals and fishes. The bounty of the Great Nile will be our children's. And as I harness the life of our land, I will harness the blood of our home, the Nile."

I realized for the first time that I could not escape this marriage for I was pharaoh's daughter and Narmer's prisoner. "My ancestors have lived in Thiis for all of time. I will not leave. It is my home."

"You will leave," Narmer said calmly.

"And go where? Nekhem? Live in the Delta muds?" My protests weakened, even to my own ears.

Narmer shrugged. "Neither capital is worthy of your beauty, Merneith." He bent over and breathed on the floodwaters of the great Nile.

It seemed as if all the gods knelt beside us in the Nile. The power felt as bright as the stars. I wanted to cry, to run away. What had he done to me that I could feel them? Did he see my fear?

"I will control the course of the Great Waters," he said. "And in its protective embrace I will build a wondrous palace for you, Merneith, and for the gods in thanks."

I merely shook my head, overwhelmed by the power surging through the deathly still floodwaters. Into the water Narmer reached and pulled out his carving. It was now a tablet, made not of mud but of slate. He cradled his spell in his left arm and stood, extending his free hand to me. On its own accord my hand raised toward his. I forced it to stop. Moonlight glistened off his eyes and pale face. A drop of water ran down my arm and dripped into the floodwaters. After a few heartbeats another drop returned to the Waters. Narmer waited. The goddesses

whispered around me. All urged me to accept, some to foil his plans, others advised patience; soon I would believe in the future of which he spoke. Time would show me his true heart, Goddess Ma-at promised.

Slowly I extended my hand and he pulled me out of the mud. My head barely came up to his chin. I touched the tablet.

"What will happen if this plaque is broken, say, smashed on the palace steps?"

"The spell will be broken. I will fail."

"You are mad to think you can succeed."

Narmer smiled again. "I am the son of gods."

I nodded. "Perhaps you are. How will you keep your enemies from learning of its powers?"

"I trust in the gods."

"I am not a god." I gently took the tablet from his grasp, he let me after only a slight hesitation. "Do you trust me? It is newly made and perhaps fragile. It would not take much for even me to destroy it."

"You are my queen." Narmer took a deep breath. "My future is yours. Merneith, will you mother a race of gods that will rule this land after our rule is long dead?"

"Our rule?"

"Even a god needs a goddess. I need you beside me, for you are more than you seem. Are you not?"

I traced the animal carvings with my fingers, listening to all the whispers around me. "I will take this into my chambers. Here, where you have the panthers' long necks intertwine, I will mix my eye makeup. It will appear as a trinket, nothing more. None of your enemies will ever learn of its value from me. Will you trust me with this, as well as your children?" I looked up at him, willing my eyes to show no trace of my thoughts.

"If I fail in my promises to protect our people?"

"I will destroy it. And you. That I promise you." I made my answer sure and as steady as the floods.

Narmer waited, as still as the Nile. "Your threat is more dangerous than a knife in the night. Egypt would survive such a knife attack, but not the death of this magic." His words were soft, as if only a thought he did not know he voiced. He nodded his head once. Together we walked through the flood-soaked fields toward his small boat. Narmer watched as I cradled the tablet to my breast. He put his arm around me and matched his long steps to my shorter ones. I did not pull away. At the beginning of the wars, I had asked the gods for the power to protect my land. They now gave it to me. I would never have guessed it to be in the form I now held. A shooting star streaked across the sky, reflecting in the water as the other stars did.

"Promise me also," I began, "that you will make this united Egypt as constant as the stars of Nuut, and not a passing brightness that will die too soon. That it will survive as long as the gods."

"I promise," Narmer said.

"Then I will be your queen and wife as well as protectress of your magic." I clutched the magic tablet more closely to my heart. "Though do not expect me to honor your gods."

Narmer grinned. "I have chosen well. You are Pharaoh's daughter and know your duty. I hope someday you'll love me as much as you do your beloved land."

His smile dimmed as I pulled away. "You may fool the gods, but never me. I love only my land, and you have given me the power to protect it: in this tablet and showing me Their way. For I understand your magic, and understanding is always the first step to using." He did not answer me. "Do you regret giving me such power?"

"Never. You are pharaoh's daughter and child of all gods."

I set my infant son on the hard floor. The guards surrounding us tensed, watching my every movement. My arms ached, even my baby's slight weight had grown heavy after hours of holding him while we waited. He slept with the peace of one too young to know what went on around him. He was fed and dry and therefore content. I felt the hardness of the brick tile beneath my knees and the ache in my every muscle. I longed to return to my bed. One part of me wanted to know: if I was going to die, why couldn't it be in my own bed?

My son cooed in his sleep. He was still too young for his father to have given him a name. Had my messengers even reached Narmer on the battlefields to tell him he had a son? I longed to shift my weight or just to sit on the floor. The warriors guarding me would say nothing; I was pharaoh's wife and queen.

Yet I would not give their leader such satisfaction as to see my discomfort when he returned. My gaze rested on the empty dais. Pharaoh Narmer's artisans were to have placed a throne there soon. Now the masons and sculptors were dead. They had died trying to protect their Pharaoh's son. Their red blood stained the marble and brick halls of Narmer's still-unfinished palace.

A palace I had refused to live in or even visit until it was done, along with Narmer's war. Instead, I had watched from across the wide Nile as the great marble blocks stacked one upon another, until the structure grew into a mighty hall, glistening white in the summer sun. Yet here in the throne room there was little marble. He had used common bricks, cast from the Nile's own mud, to cover the walls and the floor. And into those bricks Narmer had ordered carved the likenesses of his gods and goddesses of Lower Egypt, and those of mine from Upper Egypt — his Isis beside my Seth, my Neith beside his Osiris. All twice life-size, perhaps more, and brightly painted. This room was the Egypt of his visions, and my prayers. I eagerly sought to behold all the beauty here.

I tilted back my head to absorb the image of Nuut, both painted and carved into the ceiling bricks, high above. A dizziness threatened to take my senses. I steadied myself by bracing my hands against the floor. The fit passed. Even though no sunshine had fallen on this brick tile in many months a warmth radiated through my hands from the floor, a warmth that had nothing to do with the day's heat. It was as if Re's power poured into my hands and my legs. I longed to lay down on the smooth, blue-glazed brick.

Approaching heavy footsteps echoed off the hallways. I tried to kneel a little straighter as I ignored the protest from my legs.

"Has she moved?" a deep voiced asked — a voice I had once respected and now hated. No, not hated; he did what he thought was best for our Egypt. We all did. This warrior could kill me, but I knew Narmer's magic was safe and so was Egypt.

"Only to set the child down, my Lord," one guard answered.

Footsteps approached and then circled me. Lord Ke-urt wore a smug grin. He seemed so pleased with himself, still covered in the blood of his

defeated enemy. His mace and knife hung at his side.

"Have you no words of greetings for me, cousin?"

"If you had asked, cousin," I answered, "I would have given you a tour of Pharaoh's palace once it was finished."

He chuckled as he sauntered about the throne room. Its deep-blue floor, white columns and the paintings all shone with an inner beauty. The glazed tiles seemed so thin, the Nile's sands so near to my reach. I longed to immerse myself in its cool power, in the sand and water and mud.

"I must admit this palace is impressive," he began. "Only Narmer would be bold enough to alter the very path of the Nile to build his palace while letting a small stream meander through the courtyards and gardens to fill his fountains. Or was this a bribe to win your love?"

"I do not bribe so easily. You should know that, Ke-urt."

Sudden anger colored his face a deep red. "You have given him a son and betrayed our ancestors by loving him!"

"Giving Narmer a child, even a son, does not require my love."

He studied me, his anger waning slightly. "I had heard your wedding was forced, but thought you loved him by now."

"Why would you think that? I love only my land."

I remembered Narmer's words to me: The land. The Nile. I will build your new home on the very riverbed where the Nile flowed last year and all the years since creation. The gods gave power to the river, it bleeds into the land, even as its waters flows in our very blood ....

I could feel the power bleeding into my knees, my legs, my heart. An ancient power. It fed my fears, my hopes. Narmer's magic tablet was safely hidden in nearby ruins. I had managed that, if nothing else, this morning. If I had had more time, perhaps my son would be away from the city by now, too.

"Answer me!" Ke-urt was beside me, his tight grip painful on my arm.

"Forgive my inattention. What is your wish? Speak it again so I may answer."

"Renounce Narmer as Pharaoh and your husband and I will let you live."

"And my son?"

"He will die."

I pulled my arm from his grip. "My life is nothing. Even my son's life is nothing. You once loved Egypt. Do you still love the Land?"

Artwork by Michael Kucharski

"I love Upper Egypt, Sha-mei, the land of our fathers. I will destroy Narmer and Lower Egypt. I will wipe out all memory of his gods. Osiris will die again!" He leaned close to me. "Renounce Narmer, marry me, be my queen and I'll let your child live."

I bent to pick up my son. The tiles felt hot to my glancing touch. Even my son's linen blankets felt warm. I could feel the power building around me. Egypt is the Nile, the Nile is Egypt. The palace was both.

"It is easy payment for you, Ke-urt. You cannot be Pharaoh without such a marriage. I feel differently."

"You do love him!"

"Narmer is nothing. Take his life, if you can."

"Renounce him!" Ke-urt fumbled for his knife.

"As Pharaoh? Gladly, but never will I renounce our united Egypt! Isis — Nephthys — Ma-at — Nuut, goddess of both Upper and Lower Egypt, hear my call. Seth — Osiris — Horus — Re, protect Egypt. Keep her safe from all

harm. Destroy this would-be-thief and warrior."

Ke-urt stood before me, his disbelief clear even as his anger quickened. He clenched his knife, his reason gone as he drew back to wield it. The floor beneath us trembled, then heaved. One ceiling tile fell, others followed. I clung to my son and closed my eyes. I didn't want to see Ke-urt's knife reach us; still I knew the gods and goddesses would avenge our deaths, and Narmer would keep Egypt safe even without me. The whole palace shook. Crashing bricks and screams of dying soldiers filled my ears. My own screams and those of my son echoed through the rising dust as columns collapsed and the ceiling tumbled around me. I prayed to every god and goddess I could name, both mine and Narmer's, to free Egypt of those who would divide her again.

Power seeped into my limbs, a warm, soothing power. I opened my eyes to see the stars of Nuut high and bright over my head. "Father Osiris, am I dead?"

There was a soft chuckle at my side. "No, the gods have spared you to continue bringing mischief into my life."

Narmer sat beside me near a fire. I tried to lift my hand and could not. "Why can't I move my arm?"

"It's broken. You have more bruises than I care to count and a few broken bones. But your physicians are encouraged by your stubbornness."

"Our son?" My heart seemed to pause in fear.

"Bruised but safe."

My breath came easier despite my growing awareness of pain. Narmer's lips caressed my forehead. Firelight glinted off his dark eyes; his face looked strained.

"How did you make it back to me so soon?" I asked. I could feel the power seeping up through the dried mud upon which I lay, and which had once been the Nile's bed. The energy flowed through my limbs, easing the pain. The ruin of his once magnificent palace lay around us.

"It has been days since you brought the walls down around your head and killed our strongest enemy. Before I rebuild your palace, I will reconsider what we make it out of."

A drowsiness crept over me. "Yes," I told my pharaoh and husband. "Reconsider the materials very carefully. Use more bricks and less marble." I listened to his soft laughter as both his face and the starlight faded into dreams of the goddesses.

❄

KATHLEEN M. MASSIE–FERCH lives in south–central Wisconsin with her husband and an assortment of animals that includes two Scottie dogs, numerous mice, fish, and a baby rabbit. She works for the University of Wisconsin as a research geologist and has had a number of short stories published. This is her second appearance in MZB's *FANTASY Magazine*. Recently, she has expanded her activities and co–edited two historical fantasy anthologies with Martin H. Greenberg for DAW Books, **WARRIOR ENCHANTRESSES** and **ANCIENT ENCHANTRESSES**.

MICHAEL KUCHARSKI has worked as a professional illustrator and graphic artist in the advertising and journalism fields for nearly two decades. His work has appeared in such diverse forms as book covers, game boxes, calendars, medical illustrations, and posters as well as magazine illustrations for sf publications such as *Midnight Zoo* and *Pandora* and various non-sf magazines. In recent years he has begun showing his work in art shows at science fiction conventions. Michael lives in Michigan.

Artwork by Michael Kucharski

While supplies last...

Back issues of the Darkover Newsletter are available for $2.00 each (Canada $2.75, other foreign $4.50). Issues remaining are #65 through #70.

Copies of the decidedly *non*-X-rated "Consenting Adults of Darkover" filk cassette* are $11.00; the matching songbook is $5.00. Checks for the newsletter or Consenting Adults must be in U.S. funds, payable to Marion Zimmer Bradley. Order from P.O. Box 72, Berkeley CA 94701.

***The name comes from MZB's oft-repeated comment that "filking should be done in private by consenting adults."**

Letters

MILLIONS AND MILLIONS...OF QUESTIONS

Wendy Sornberger, Rexford NY

One of my favorite parts of the magazine is the author interview. How about an interview with MZB herself? I can think of a million different questions I'd love to ask her about her life, science fiction and fantasy, and the state of publishing today.

Now there's an idea: how about an interview of MZB conducted by our readers? Send us the question(s) you always wanted to ask Marion (let's keep it to no more than three apiece) and we'll conduct an interview based on them. Send questions to the usual magazine address but mark the envelope clearly "MZB interview". —REH

A CLEAR SENSE OF PRIORITIES

Nancy A Humphrey, Germantown WI

Received Issue #32 in my mailbox late in the afternoon; grabbed a frozen dinner to eat; made sure my phone answering machine was plugged in; put away the car; turned off all lights in the front part of the house; made a fresh pitcher of iced tea; and started with page 1. WOW!! You get better and better.

Well, I hope you microwaved the dinner first! —REH

DREAMS ON THE DOORSTEP

R C Rhodes, Irvine CA

It is your own fault, you know. Well, perhaps not entirely. I'm referring to your slightly chiding editorial about people not reading your guidelines. It is not surprising to me at all that people wish to share their work with you. You have touched them and, like it or not, they will continue to lay their half-formed, irregular-shaped dreams at your door. It is not the sound of your editorials to which they listen.

I still hear voices that call to me from your novels. They say, *Yes you can; go ahead. Don't turn back. Dream, climb, fly.* My feet are firmly anchored in the practical day-to-day business world and, were I to submit my work to you, I would certainly follow your guidelines. Having said this, there are days when the other voices threaten to override convention, rules, formats, and guidelines. I cheer them on even as I hammer them down.

Should I ever meet you at a conference, I will not regale you with stories or ideas, I will, instead, wish you well and thank you for the voices that chase me to the keyboard every week. There is no better compliment I can pay you.

AUSTRALIAN ANTHOLOGY

Naomi Hatchman, Eastwood NSW Australia

I was pleased to see Rachel Holmen mentioning Australian writers in "The Last Word" in issue #32, and I can also provide some information for her: the Australian women's fantasy anthology is entitled **SHE'S FANTASTICAL**. If your readers would like to chase up a copy, Slow Glass Books takes mail orders and can be contacted at:

Slow Glass Books
GPO Box 2708X
Melbourne VIC 3001
Australia

*I found their web page (look on www.vicnet.net.au/vicnet/book.htm for a link) but they didn't appear to take credit-card orders by email, or even **have** an email address. (By the way, you can send us orders or changes of address by email - but **not** story submissions.) -- REH*

THE THREE LAWS OF REJECTO-DYNAMICS

Beth Slick, Venice CA

The letter from Joseph M Erhardt [suggesting more gentle rejection slips] was interesting, but I think he missed the point of his own letter. I believe the phrasing of a rejection, as long as it includes a cogent reason for the decision, is virtually immaterial. Don't "blame the message"; understand the Physics of Rejection.

The Physics of Rejection's fundamental law is that the pain of rejection is equal to the emotional investment riding on the submission. The second law declares that when the author routinely submits their worth as a human being along with the story, the pain of rejection increases tenfold. The third, and final, law states that when the author sends a story to a person (or a particular magazine) who has been a source of inspiration, an object of admiration, or the reason they wanted to become a writer in the first place, the agony increases by another factor of ten. Nothing's worse than being rejected by "God".

I do agree with Erhardt on one point. You, as an accomplished author, are likely an object of inspiration mentioned in the third law. Submittors place more importance on receiving Marion Zimmer Bradley's approbation than that of magazine editor John Q. Unknown. Your positive or negative reactions are probably more deeply felt because they are, simply, yours; not because of the wording.

However, that's something the submittor must learn to manage.

'Fraid so. —REH

ANOTHER GIFT

Bea Sheftel, Manchester CT

Issue #31 was the first issue of your magazine that I ever read. I feel very lucky to have found it, because "The Other Gift" touched my heart. It reminded me of the experience I had with my dad.

When my father was first brought to the hospital, the doctor held out hope that his life could be saved by an operation. Dad was unable to speak, but we all knew he cherished life, and we agreed to the operation. I went home and prayed for my father. I felt a need to write in my journal the words which came to my mind. What I wrote surprised me and left me in tears at the task I had been given. It was to be my last gift to my father. I was to pray for him at his bedside, my voice to fill the silent void and comfort him on his journey from this life to the next. Like the boy in the story who almost resisted his grandfather's last request, I too thought I would be unable to do what was asked of me. I prayed for strength because saying goodbye to my father was the hardest thing I ever had to do. I wanted him to live.

And so, those final days of his life, I was by his bedside, reading from the Bible, praying for him as his voice — and in a spiritual way joined to him like I've never been before. I hadn't thought of what I'd done as a gift until I read the story in your magazine. It brought me great comfort.

The stories that touch us most deeply are the true ones — even if they are fantasies. —MZB

THE WIZARDS' DENTIST

by Howard Holman

Cuspin ignored the pain, carefully slipping through the purple curtains which separated his sleep and work area from the showroom. The wagon, which served as his home, his business, and his transportation, was a large one, but it seemed cramped and small, stuffed with his possessions and wares, void of any windows which would make it seem bigger.

The door's high-pitched bell rang again as the door shut, and Cuspin tightened the rope around his waist, cinching up his brown robe for a more professional appearance. A customer had entered his wagon, which always put a smile on his face. Not many people had seen a wizards' dentist, and their puzzlement often led to fear and mistrust. It was then difficult to get them to come in. But once they were in...

The customer was a young man, a boy really, probably no more than fifteen, and he looked about the room with wide, brown eyes which showed wonder and a touch of disgust. Along the walls of the showroom, hanging with finely spun white string, were teeth, all white and polished to a pearl finish so that the light from the oil lamps bounced off them. Before the boy was a display case of stained oak with wonderfully large pieces of clear glass. On the case's shelves were more teeth, these long and pointed and equally polished, each in its own jewelry box and connected to a silver chain.

It was only when the boy knelt down to get a closer look at the display case that Cuspin spoke.

"They are indeed beautiful, aren't they?" he smiled.

The boy shot up like a scared pheasant. "I... I was just looking, sir! I read the sign on your wagon, and I only wanted to see what a wizards' dentist was! Honest!" He began stepping back toward the door.

"Please, please don't leave," coaxed Cuspin. "I didn't mean to scare you. It is just so nice to have someone admiring my work. Most people are afraid of me for some reason. They think that because I'm a wizards' dentist I might do a spell on them. And when they see the amulets, they are afraid maybe I'm after their teeth."

The boy stopped halfway to the door. "I know. They tell stories around here about wizards. People don't trust 'em."

"Do you think all wizards are bad?" asked Cuspin.

"No, *I* don't. I like magic. In fact that's why I'm leaving. I'm going to the city, finding me an apprenticeship with a wizard, and then coming back here to show them it's okay."

For the first time Cuspin noticed a small pack slung back over the boy's shoulder, made out of what appeared to be several reddish-brown fox hides.

"What a wonderful adventure you're about to undertake," said Cuspin. "What did you say your name was?"

"I'm sorry, I should have said that right off. My name's Thomas. My father owns the mill in a village to the east." The boy stepped forward and extended his hand, which Cuspin grasped and shook.

"A good grip for a future wizard!" exclaimed Cuspin, and the boy seemed pleased.

"Thank you, sir. Do you really think so?"

"Why, of course. I'm Cuspin Wells, wizards' dentist, and I should know. I've worked with many of the best wizards around."

"Really? So you've pulled the teeth of some of the wizards in the guild?"

"Boy, I *only* pull the teeth of guild wizards. They are the only ones who can pay me what I require. But don't think I'm some kind of elitist. I often help even the lowest level of wizard. It's from them I obtain the teeth for the magic amulets on the walls.

Thomas paused for a moment and even tried to count the hanging amulets. There were at least fifty.

"Mr. Wells, I have heard of dentists before, but most I've seen are also barbers, and I've never heard of one just for wizards. I didn't think that dentists kept teeth, either, yet you hang 'em on strings for sale. It all appears awfully odd to me."

Cuspin crossed his arms and arched his thin black eyebrows over his dark eyes in an almost indignant way. His

middle-aged, slightly-graying appearance seemed to grow suddenly big and powerful in the flickering lamplight, and Thomas thought for a second he had said something very wrong. But soon a grin appeared on Cuspin's large face, showing in truth it was all an act.

"Thomas, my boy, normally I would ask an uninformed customer like yourself to leave now. I don't have time to be explaining what I do. But since you are an aspiring wizard, eventually you may be a client of mine. Therefore, I will explain my profession by giving you your first lesson in magic."

Thomas lowered his pack onto the wagon's wood plank floor with a thud and some clinking. Cuspin smiled and began.

"Thomas, the first things you will be taught as an apprentice are a few simple spells, mostly for menial tasks like dusting or washing, but in many ways they will be the most difficult to learn. You see, when a wizard uses magic, it must flow through every part of him before it can work properly. Many aspiring wizards tend to use just their heads or focus on their hands. But it is not until every last part of you feels the magic that the spell will actually work. Only after you learn how to let the magic flow for these first easy spells will you know how to do it for the harder ones.

"Now when I say every last part of you, that also includes your teeth. If a wizard were to go to any ordinary dentist for a tooth extraction, essentially a piece of his magic would be taken away, and it may take months before he can properly regain his flow and cast a spell. As a wizards' dentist, I am an expert in taking the tooth without disrupting this flow of magic."

Thomas's face momentarily scrunched up in thought. "So that's how it's done," he finally said. "I wondered what the secret was. I never knew how spells were cast or how important it would be to have a capable wizards' dentist. You must charge a lot of coins for your work."

"Actually, I don't charge any coins. Instead my fee is to keep their teeth, which I turn into the magic amulets you see."

"Amulets?" Thomas again looked at the teeth hanging on the wall. "Why would you use teeth to make magic amulets?"

"Because the tooth of a wizard, as anything which comes in contact with magic, will resonate magic itself. Of course, the more experienced and powerful the wizard, the more powerful the amulet from his tooth. For example, the amulets on strings hanging on the walls are from apprentices and lesser wizards. They serve mainly as good luck charms. For instance, they might make you choose the left path instead of the right, thus avoiding the inconvenience of a washed-out bridge. Or they might distract you just long enough to avoid being hit by a dead tree's falling limb."

"What about leading someone to a master wizard who is looking for a young apprentice to teach?"

Cuspin's eyes narrowed somewhat as he studied the boy. "Thomas, I don't give these amulets away. They do cost coins. It's how I make my living. Perhaps, if you really want an amulet, you need to come back with your father and he can purchase one for you."

"Sir, I wouldn't ask a wizards' dentist to give me something for free. I have my life savings in this pack. And if one of your amulets can help me, I'm

Artwork by Donald W. Rissler

Artwork by Donald W. Rissler

sure I would have enough for one of the less expensive ones."

"Ah," nodded Cuspin, "I see. But I'm afraid these amulets on the wall won't be powerful enough for you. They don't really help you get something you want. They work in the background, save you from an inconvenience or two, keep you from a few scrapes and bruises. In fact, you may not even know they're working. Now, for an aspiring wizard such as yourself..."

Cuspin removed from his brown robe a thick, brass key with which he opened the display case. Carefully he withdrew several of the amulets on silver chains and placed them on the glass counter top. "These may be closer to your liking. These amulets have all been taken from master wizards with a minimum of one hundred major spells under their belts. A few feature the teeth of elven wizards. Now of course, these silver-chained amulets are more expensive. The luck charms are ten coins, and these range from thirty to sixty. But they are also more powerful, especially to a wizard apprentice like yourself."

"What do they do?" asked Thomas after Cuspin paused for a few seconds.

"For those who don't use magic, they serve as a protection against it, for unless a wizard purposely harmonizes his magic, his spells repel the spells of others. But for a user of magic, these amulets actually enhance spellcasting, strengthening and intensifying. For you it would mean learning spells faster and impressing the guild members. In this way you could eventually attract the best teacher..."

Thomas' eyes reflected the pearly white of the amulets. "Which one belonged to an elven wizard?"

"A wise request," smiled Cuspin as he pushed one of the amulets, a pointed canine, toward Thomas. "Elven magic has a special flow to it, making it ideal for an amulet of this sort. However, it does cost sixty coins. I don't know that you'd have enough."

"Oh, I have enough!" said an excited Thomas as he knelt down over his pack. He untied one end and pulled out a gray sack which clinked as he lifted it onto the counter. Carefully he opened it and began counting out the coins. When he had reached sixty, the sack was still heavy and bulging. "Father also lent me some money from the mill. He's the only one who believes in me. No one else in the family even believes in good magic. They say all magicians are evil."

"It is nice to have someone believe in you," said Cuspin as he expertly put the coins in piles of ten. "That's sixty coins exactly, and the amulet is yours." He began to close the box containing the amulet but then paused, shaking his head.

"What?" asked Thomas. "What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing," said Cuspin. "It's just there's something I haven't shown you. I have one more tooth amulet, but it is the only one of its kind in my possession. I didn't plan on selling it on this trip. Not a lot of people out here who can use it. But then I didn't expect to see an aspiring wizard either."

"Please, may I see it?"

"Well, all right. But I must warn you. It's expensive, and I won't come down in price no matter how much you want it."

Cuspin went behind the curtain and in a few minutes emerged with a red box twice the size of the other jewelry boxes. It looked almost like a red brick to Thomas as the dentist placed it on the counter. Snapping the box open, Cuspin pushed it over toward the boy.

"It's beautiful!" exclaimed Thomas. And it was. Over four inches in length, it was another canine, perfectly pointed like a throwing spear, slightly curved like an eagle's claw. It was a polished, brilliant white which almost glowed, and an intricately designed gold chain ran through its top. "Whose tooth is this?"

"This, of course, is the tooth of a wizard," explained Cuspin, "but under a very unique circumstance. You see, this wizard had a tremendous toothache and wanted me to pull it out, but I had just left his city and wouldn't be back for a month or two. So he tried to ignore it and go about his business.

"This wizard later performed a most difficult shape-changing spell, turning himself into a dragon. Unfortunately, he didn't realize that when you transform yourself into a creature ten times your size, your aches and pains also grow. His tooth hurt so much he could hardly think, let alone turn back into human form.

"Anyway, with the help of some of the other wizards, he eventually tracked me down, and after three hours I was able to extract the tooth. I was left with this..." Cuspin removed the amulet from its box and held up the canine, turning it in the light. "This tooth is a

shape-changed tooth, and it resonates the most powerful magic of any of my amulets. To most people it is worthless, but to a wizard, it is power. This amulet almost can spellcast itself. Like a spider, it takes your simple threads of magic and begins to weave the spell itself, adding lines, designing new ones, taking your basic words of magic and turning them with unexpected twists and twirls. It can become for a wizard even more valuable than a spellbook."

Thomas could hardly breathe. He had to have that amulet. "How much?"

"One hundred coins, and not a coin less."

Thomas quickly began counting the rest of his coins. For a moment, both men, the young one and the older one, worried that there weren't enough, but when the sack was empty, Thomas had reached one hundred and four. Placing the extras in a pocket, the boy pushed the rest of the coins toward Cuspin. "There, one hundred coins!"

Cuspin handed the amulet with the gold chain to the wizard apprentice. "Keep this packed away until you start your apprenticeship, and then keep it hidden beneath your tunic. Wizards will want it, and you must never give it up, never tell anyone about it."

"I won't!" Thomas placed the amulet in his pack and carefully tied it up. Flinging the pack on his shoulder, he nodded good-bye to Cuspin and then exited through the door, bathing the wagon's interior in late afternoon sunlight.

As the door closed, once again shutting out the sun's dying rays, Cuspin gathered the coins into the discarded sack and then took it through the purple curtains to his work area. Beneath his workbench, he felt for the loose board and, finding it, lifted it to reveal a small compartment. Keeping a few coins for himself, he placed the sack in the hole and replaced the board.

As Cuspin returned to his feet, he shook his head at the mess on the workbench. Quickly he put the carving tools and brushes in their holders and closed the bottle of white paint. He even took a rag and dusted the bench for good measure.

In a few minutes, Cuspin was heading out the wagon's narrow side door, jiggling the coins in his pocket. Most wagons didn't have two doors, and he had never really needed this extra one, but he felt more secure knowing there was a second way out.

The afternoon sun had almost settled behind the western mountains as Cuspin stepped down to the dusty ground, blinking rapidly as his eyes adjusted to the orange-yellow light. He was pleased with his timing. Before dark he could get to the slaughterhouse on the other end of town to pick up a few teeth. Maybe they'd even have the horn of a young bull for a new dragon's tooth amulet. Then he could get dinner, maybe a hot bath, retrieve his two horses from the stables, and be out of the village by midnight.

As he walked into town, a sharp pain began shooting again through his mouth. "Damn tooth!" he muttered. He'd forgotten about it while talking to the boy. "The first thing I've got to do tomorrow," he reminded himself, "is find a village with a dentist!"

❄

Howard Holman is not (as far as she knows) any relation to my publisher, Rachel Holmen, although she does have relatives who spell their last name "Holman". Howard, afflicted with Becker's muscular dystrophy at age four, soon discovered that no matter what his physical limitations, his imagination was boundless. He has a secondary teaching credential in English and is working toward a Master's degree in English. This story is his first professional sale.

Donald W. Rissler holds several degrees in Fine Art and Illustration, and has worked as a freelance illustrator for the past five years. He currently resides in Seattle, and is in the midst of acquiring a computer science degree and another art degree at the University of Washington.

Special Offer for Fans of Jo Clayton's "ARAKNEY"!

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Four of the five have Nick Jainschigg's beautiful covers for Jo's "Arakney" stories. These covers, which use Nick Jainschigg's mother-in-law as a model for Arakney, were recently acclaimed at WisCon 20's panel on women in fantasy artwork. The interior illustrations are witty and beautifully-drawn. The fifth cover is by James Balkovek; that story has interior paintings by Alan Gutierrez.

Issue 8 - Change
Issue 18 - Arakney's Web
Issue 26 - Dinner Music
Issue 29 - Bloodsong
Issue 32 - Fox Maid's Travail

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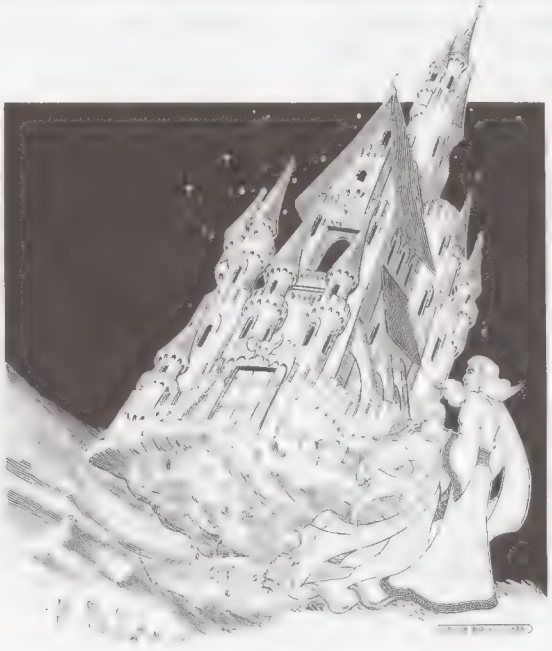

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The artwork on the front is George Barr's line drawing of a flying castle, based on the cover of issue #1. The back lists every artist and author published and/or interviewed in the first twenty-five issues. Printed in white on a heavyweight black Tshirt, sizes M - L - XL - XXL. Other sizes by request. These make great gifts! $16.95 includes shipping and handling within the U.S. (Canada: $1.50 additional. Please make checks payable in U.S. funds.)

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The Last Word

So. Did you notice the new logo on the cover? I decided it was time we had some small, catchy symbol to counterbalance the thirteen syllables of our name, and I talked to Margaret Davis on our staff, who actually developed the logo (and about sixteen others that I vetoed — she is very patient).

(Incidentally, Margaret's band just got back from a tour to promote their newly-recorded tape of songs by J.R.R. Tolkein, with music written by Marion Zimmer Bradley, Margaret Davis, and her husband Kristoph Klover; it's called **The Starlit Jewel;** $13.50 incl. shipping and tax from Flowinglass Music, 2821 Truman Ave., Oakland CA 94605.)

There are terrific things lined up for future issues. Steven Piziks, whose stories just keep getting better and better, has two stories waiting to see print; we have a cover story from Mary Aldridge (the woman whose story in issue 3 was a Nebula nominee). You might remember that eluki bes shahar writes romances as "Rosemary Edghill". Well, we bought a story recently from India Edghill — her sister — who sent us a fantasy about Queen Elizabeth I which we think will enchant anyone who reads it. We have stories by Julia S. Mandala, Jackie Shank, Richard Calantropio, Carrie Martin, Russell William Asplund, Lee Martindale, Lawrence Schimel, Cynthia McQuillin, Richard Purtill, Patricia Russo, and Jo Clayton...

Speaking of Jo Clayton, as this issue was being assembled, she was battling for her life against cancer. The latest news will be online — in CompuServe's SFLit forum and on GEnie's SFRT — but we can tell you that cards and letters are welcome (though please don't write anything that requires a reply); send them to us and we will forward them every day or two.

Since I will be in Portland in September, I have told Jo that I will come visit if she's still in the hospital — and that's a **threat**. (I'll go to the hospital and **scare** the cancer away! Mess with my friends, will it????)

We certainly hope there are more "Arakney" stories; in fact, these have

been so popular, and the beautiful Nick Jainschigg covers so well-received, that we decided in June to offer a "Jo Clayton special" to her fans. Five back issues, each with a Jo Clayton cover story, mailed to any U.S. address for $15.00.

Here's additional information on W.A. Chandler (see p. 23): He has held the wide range of jobs that often marks a writer: guitarist, radio announcer, karate instructor... He lives with his wife, children, and cats.

Department of Bloopers and Goofs: Ann Sharp's column title was missing a few letters last issue; it should have read "How Can I Write Sympathetic Characters?"

I just sent out an anthology proposal to a book publisher for another "Best of Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine", so there may be at least one more volume of these in print someday. I have some other ideas up my sleeve, as well, based on stories from this magazine.

However, in response to an increasing number of requests: no, we do not plan to publish an electronic version of the magazine any time soon. For one thing, that would require a revised contract for any new stories, and entirely new contracts for any previously-published stories. The whole issue of electronic rights is so complex that for the moment, we are just avoiding it. We will continue to put up on our web page things which we hope are of interest, but not whole stories. (I believe there will be an interesting announcement at the WorldCon about a source of electronic sf and fantasy stories...pay attention to the tall man who used to work at Wizards of the Coast...)

Neither do we accept electronic submissions. Marion herself has never been online and while she uses a computer to create her own works, she does have vision problems (diabetic retinopathy, if you prefer specific info), and she wants to see submissions on paper, where she can write comments in the margin about spelling and usage errors, queries to me, etc. (And we don't feel its our job to print out your files; sorry.)

Still, you can use my email address to send credit-card orders (Visa or Mastercard) for back issues and subscriptions, changes of address, and manuscript status queries. My address is 71333.2726@compuserve.com; I also have a GEnie account as R.Holmen.

The magazine's web page is **http://www.well.com/user/mzbfm/**; there is a link to my email account also. (And for that matter, a link to my personal page — see me in pseudo-medieval garb with genuine hand embroidery; look at my cat.)

One last piece of news: I accepted an interesting invitation recently. No, that doesn't mean I'm leaving the magazine. But I **will** be a judge for the World Fantasy Awards to be given for works published in 1996. So if you have read any good fantasy recently (besides what you see here; trust me, I've read **everything** we've published since I took over from Jan Burke, though actually there are some back issues I haven't looked at closely), send me a suggestion or arrange for the publisher to send me a copy in care of the magazine's P.O. Box. Thanks. — *Rachel E. Holmen*

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The Cauldron — Issue #33

Story	Artist
❑ **A Sphinx in the Mind** by Karen Anderson	❑ Margaret Organ-Kean
❑ **A Painterly Effect** by Ardath Mayhar	❑ Darlene Coltrain
❑ **The Servant** by W. A. Chandler	❑ Julia Lacquement
❑ **The Serpent Within** by Terry McGarry	❑ Alan Gutierrez
❑ **Snow like Wool, Frost like Ashes** by Tracey S. Rosenberg	❑ Rob Alexander
❑ **Toe Heaven** by Marion Zimmer Bradley	❑ George Barr
❑ **Stirring the Ashes** by Mary Ann Schenk	❑ Cat Walker
❑ **Which She Was** by Jennifer Schwabach	❑ C. F. Yankovich
❑ **United Powers** by Kathleen M. Massie-Ferch	❑ Michael Kucharski
❑ **The Wizards' Dentist** by Howard Holman	❑ Donald W. Rissler

Only one ballot per reader, please!!!

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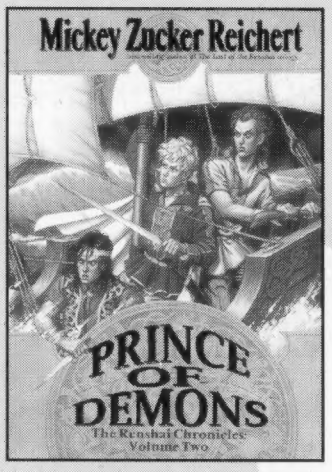

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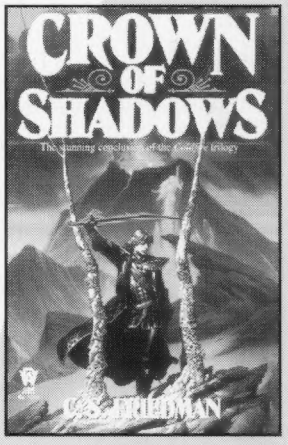

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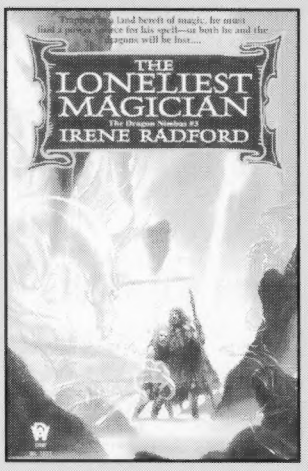

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